

# FirstGlimpse®

FirstGlimpseMag.com

## The Ultimate Solution For Your Digital Life



Nero's latest digital multimedia suite takes software beyond the PC with an easy-to-use interface and more features than ever. Find out more on page 12!

### The Road To Great Photos

### Yes, You Do Need An HD Source

### Xbox 360, Wii & PS3: The Low-Down On Each

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**On Our Cover:** *Featured on our cover this month is Nero 8 Ultra Edition.*

## Open

There's always something new and interesting happening in the world of consumer electronics. You'll hear about it all in *First Glimpse's* Open section.

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## Lifestyle Close-Up: Everything You Need For **Really** Good Photos

It wasn't so many years ago that we needed to outsource all of our digital photography needs, but this is not the case anymore. Today, we can find everything we need to build our own virtual photography studio and printing lab right at home. In this month's feature package, we guide you through everything you need to snap and print incredible photos for your friends and family.

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## Digital Imaging

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## Wireless

We're willing to bet that you can't part with your cell phone or iPod—or both! In this section, we'll tell you everything you need to know about mobile phones and their service plans, and we also cover MP3 players and the cool accessories that go with them. If you love the feeling of freedom you get with no wires or cords, this section is for you.

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## Editor's Note

*NOTE: Staff Editor Katie Dolan is filling in this month for Editor Katie Sommer, who is on maternity leave.*

For my ninth birthday, I got my most prized childhood possession: a Kodak Instamatic. It was a diminutive, point-and-shoot camera that took a 126 film cartridge and used cube-shaped, blindingly bright flashbulbs that blew out on use. Over the years, I took hundreds of pictures. I'd wait impatiently for weeks to get them developed and then lovingly arrange them in albums with découpage covers, which I gave as mementoes of birthdays, baptisms, graduations, and holidays.

Although I was oblivious at the time, the Instamatic revolutionized the photography industry, putting 50 million of the little point-and-shoot film cameras in eager amateur photographers' hands, just like mine. Drug stores began stocking film, flash cubes, and batteries, and Fotomat drive-through booths sprang up across America.

Flash forward a few decades, and there's another revolution going on: the digital-camera revolution. Although digital cameras have been around awhile, the first consumer models were bulky and expensive, the digital images compared poorly to those taken with traditional film cameras, and it was pretty tough to get your digital images printed.

Today's digital cameras are affordable, compact, and powerful, and we have tremendous options when it comes to printing, including setting up an inexpensive, digital darkroom at home and printing our own images.

In *First Glimpse* this month, we'll help you set up your own home photo studio, covering everything you'll need to get your pictures from the warm, pumpkin-pie-scented scenes of your family's Thanksgiving dinner to photos printed on specialty papers, attractive enough to give as gifts in the upcoming holiday season.

Katie Dolan  
c/o Katie Sommer  
Editor, *First Glimpse*



Katie Sommer  
Editor, *First Glimpse*

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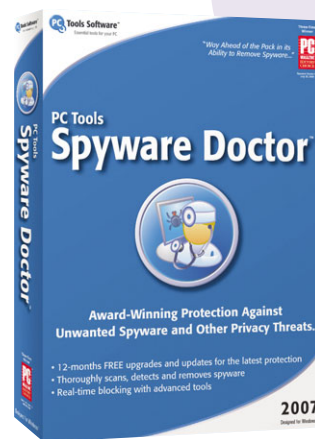
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## First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these *First Glimpse* pages to learn about the latest hot products.

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**Klipsch Quintet™ SL  
Home Theater System**  
MSRP: \$1,449 (as shown)  
[www.klipsch.com](http://www.klipsch.com)  
Available at select Best Buy™  
stores and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



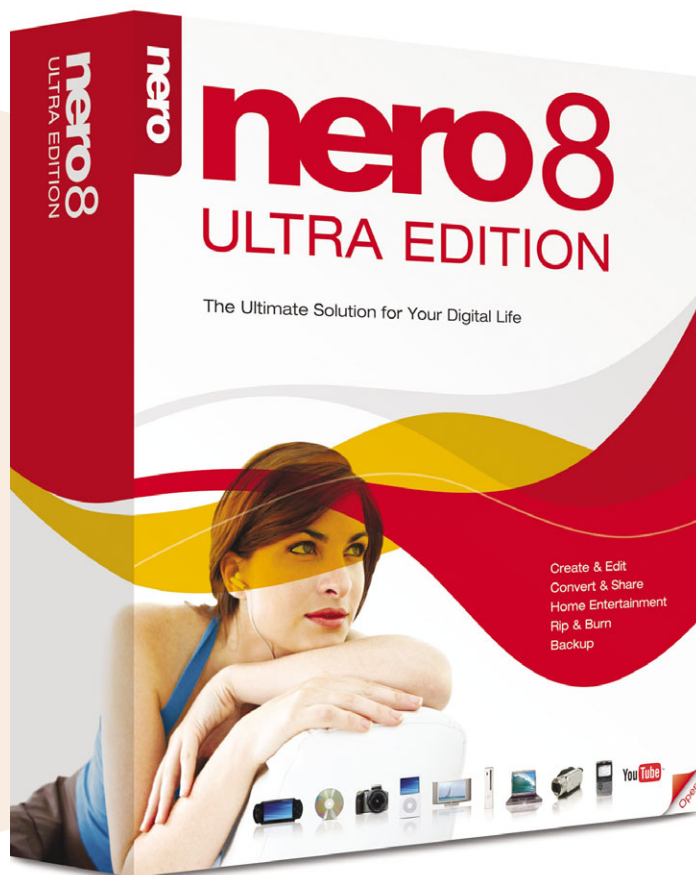
## Thrill Your Soul

A perfect match for flat-panel TVs, Klipsch's new 5-channel Quintet SL surround-sound package is built for passion, excitement, and intrigue. By applying the same cutting-edge technology as the company's professional cinema products, this system lets you experience everything your music and movies have to offer. So, don't let its flat and fabulous design fool you. A sheer brute strength lies hidden within the Quintet's elegant cabinets, and it's called the Tractrix® Horn. This exclusive technology reproduces a more genuine, lifelike sound and ensures every whisper of dialogue or wailing chorus is heard cleanly and accurately. And if it's more low-frequency power you crave, the company's optional Sub-12 subwoofer gets the hard-hitting job done. No one gets you closer to reality than Klipsch, no one.

### Features include:

- Three left/center/right speakers and two surround satellites
- Horn-loaded technology delivers lifelike performances
- High-output woofers deliver room-filling bass
- Highly efficient so it produces more output using less energy
- Clean, modern design fits any living environment
- Great for wall mounting or placement on a shelf
- 5-channel Quintet SL package retails for \$950
- Recommended Sub-12 subwoofer sold separately for \$499





## Nero 8 Ultra Edition

MSRP: \$79.99

[www.nero.com](http://www.nero.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores  
and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



## The Ultimate Solution For Your Digital Life

Nero 8 brings the digital world to your PC. Create and edit photo slideshows and high-definition video, convert your favorite content to enjoy on portable devices or share them online with friends or communities, rip and burn CDs/DVDs with easy one-click functions, create a home entertainment center with integrated TV, DVD, music, and video streaming, recording, and playback options. Rest easy with advanced backup features to protect against loss from system crash or damaged disc. Nero 8 makes your digital life fun with easy-to-use functions and cutting-edge technology to help you manage your multimedia projects.

### Nero 8 Ultra Edition Highlights:

- Introducing the most user-friendly Nero Suite ever!
- Built with consumer needs in mind for greater productivity and ease of use
- Brand new centralized and easy-to-use Nero StartSmart
- New One-Click functions providing speed and efficiency for completing projects
- Import and share to and from online communities, such as My Nero, YouTube™, and My Space®
- Play converted DVD content on your iPod®, PSP™, and other mobile devices
- Backup/disaster recovery tools added
- Stream, record, and play back multimedia files on devices throughout your home.
- Extensive support for new technologies, including Blue Laser—now supports all optical disc formats from CD, DVD, BD to HD DVD
- Play AVCHD and Blu-ray (BD-AV) video
- Optimized for Windows Vista™
- New data recovery tool with integrated SecurDisc™ Technology\*

# nero



# FirstGlimpse®

Special Product Section

## Olympus EVOLT E-510 Digital SLR

Two Lens Kit with 14-42mm (28-84mm equivalent)  
and 40-150mm (80-300mm equivalent) lenses

MSRP: \$999.99

[www.olympusamerica.com](http://www.olympusamerica.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores  
and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



## Take Your Photos To Another Level

Olympus' EVOLT E-510 Digital SLR lets you shoot better photos through leading-edge imaging technology, and it's packaged in an easy-to-use, affordable D-SLR. Designed to keep images sharp when the camera is moving, the E-510's in-body image stabilization technology offers two modes to counter camera shake in everyday or high-action settings. And, unlike most D-SLRs, the image stabilization technology is built into the body of the E-510, making any lens stabilized. As an alternative to the traditional optical viewfinder, the E-510 features an oversized, 2.5-inch Live View LCD. This lets you view photo subjects live and compose shots in difficult situations, such as high and low angles, as well as adjust white balance and exposure, like a pro. As a part of the Four Thirds System, an open standard that facilitates the optimization of size, performance, and extendibility of digital cameras and lenses, the E-510 is a versatile, cutting-edge D-SLR you can use for years to come.

### Features include:

- 100% digital, 14-42mm and 40-150mm zoom lenses
- In-body dual-mode image stabilization helps eliminate camera shake with any Olympus digital lens

- A 10MP Live-MOS Imager and TruePic III Image Processor gives you stunning detail and color
- Live View for composing, previewing, and viewing images
- 18 easy-to-use scene modes make you an instant photography expert
- Dust reduction, which eliminates dust from the image sensor for spotless photos
- High-resolution, 2.5-inch Live View LCD with anti-glare and 176-degree viewing angle
- Compatibility with Compact Flash Type I/II, Micro-drive, and xD Picture Card

Look for  
more on  
Olympus' new  
products in our  
December  
issue!

# OLYMPUS®

Look for  
more on  
Olympus' new  
products in our  
December  
issue!

## Olympus Stylus 820

MSRP: \$249.99

[www.olympusamerica.com](http://www.olympusamerica.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores

and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



## Effortless Photo Perfection

Capture life's special moments with the Olympus Stylus 820, a premium, compact digicam that is packed with advanced technology. The Stylus 820 will bring you closer to the action with its 5X optical zoom lens. With its digital image stabilization and face detection features, you will be sure to capture the perfect picture. Also included is In-Camera Panorama, a technology that will snap three photos as you slowly pan across a scene, and then stitch the shots together for a panoramic-size photo. Furthermore, you'll be able to compose perfect pictures with the Stylus 820's large, 2.7-inch HyperCrystal LCD with anti-glare. The Stylus 820 doesn't sell short on design, either. Its durable, all-weather body will keep your digicam protected from the elements. All this in a stylish package: You can buy the Stylus 820 in silver, black, and red. **Navy model is exclusively sold at Best Buy.**

### Features include:

- An 8MP, compact camera with 5X optical zoom
- A 2.7-inch HyperCrystal LCD with anti-glare technology

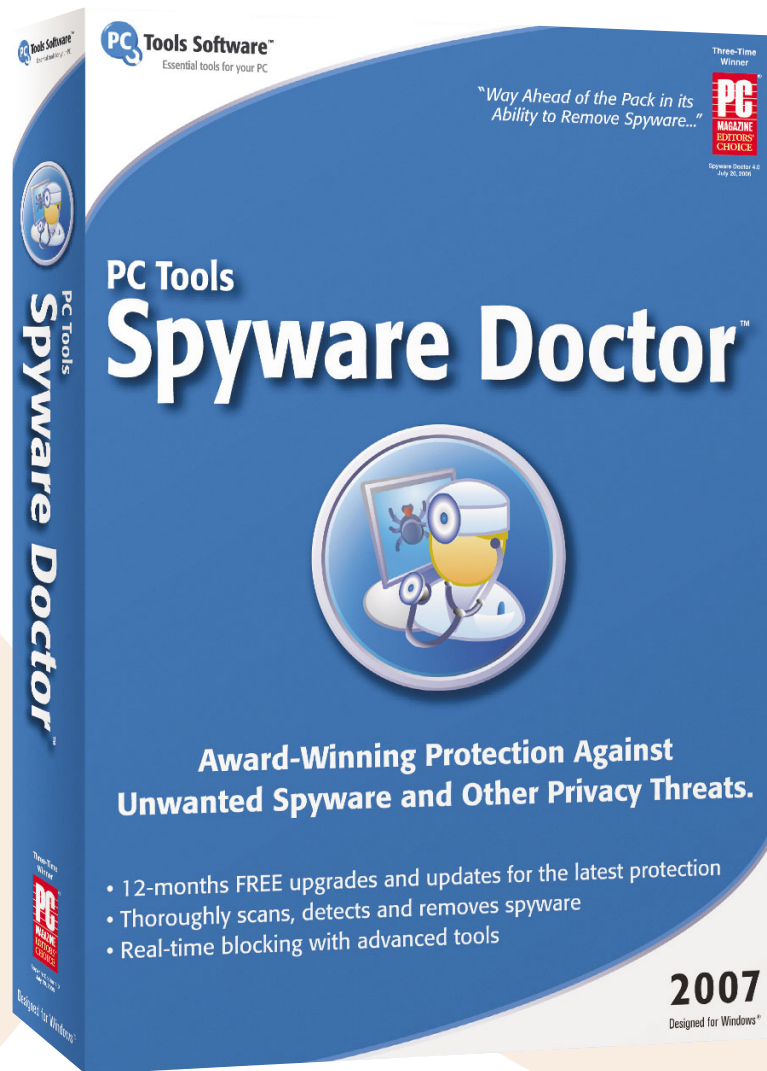
- Digital image stabilization that utilizes high-ISO sensitivity and faster shutter speeds
- Face-detection technology that will automatically focus and sharpen portrait photos
- An all-weather design that will protect you from splashes, sprays, and other elements
- Rechargeable Li-Ion battery and charger
- Included USB and Audio/Video cables

# OLYMPUS®

# FirstGlimpse®

Special Product Section

**PC Tools Spyware Doctor**  
MSRP: \$29.95  
[www.pctools.com/spyware-doctor](http://www.pctools.com/spyware-doctor)  
Available at select Best Buy™ stores  
and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



## Award-Winning Spyware Protection At A Great Price

Spyware can pose a serious risk to your PC, as well as your privacy, so it's wise to invest in antispware protection. Spyware Doctor uses state-of-the-art spyware and adware detection and blocking technology to ensure that your PC is safe. With Spyware Doctor's system scans, you can detect and remove the most advanced threats before they can damage your PC. Spyware Doctor features intelligent automatic protection, which makes the software simple for anyone to use, and it's offered at an affordable price.

### Features include:

- Detects, removes, and blocks spyware and adware threats
- Recommended by experts globally
- Daily updates to ensure you are always protected
- Easiest to use with intelligent automatic protection
- FREE customer support for all users

**PC Tools Software**  
Essential tools for your PC



## Altec Lansing Orbit

MSRP: \$39.95

[www.alteclansing.com](http://www.alteclansing.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores  
and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



## Set Your Music Free

When you need a break from your headphones and want to unleash your music onto the world, Altec Lansing's Orbit speaker system is an ideal iPod\* or MP3 player companion. Slip this palm-sized, lightweight device out of your pocket or purse, and with the flip of a switch, you're well on your way to sharing your tunes with others everywhere you go. The Orbit's Fusion360 technology integrates a cone design with a custom-built Altec Lansing speaker to project a full-bodied, 360-degree sound. And with its long battery life (up to 24 hours on three AAA batteries), the music will keep pumping long into the night.

### Features include:

- Small, lightweight design that fits easily in a pocket or bag
- Fusion360 audio design projects a 360-degree sound field
- Compatible with all iPod\* and MP3 players
- Ideal as an ultra-portable speaker for your notebook computer
- Plays for up to 24 hours on three AAA batteries
- Rugged and shock-resistant, making it perfect for travelers
- Ability to sit on its edge, which allows you to direct the audio

  
**ALTEC LANSING®**

\* iPod not included.

# Nero 8 Ultra Edition

The Ultimate Solution Made Easier



ow, *this* is more like it.

For years, Nero has enjoyed a reputation as the most reliable CD and DVD burning suite around. It's also chock full of amazing features for power users and novices alike. Over time, Nero has become not just a disc-burning suite, but also a home entertainment server, a desktop search engine, even a DVR.

But there was a problem. Nero the company was so busy packing powerful features into Nero the software suite that it didn't have time to go back and make its disparate elements and arcane settings easier to figure out. Nero 7 Ultra Edition came with everything but the kitchen sink, but new users were occasionally left wandering around simply looking for a can opener.

Much has changed in Nero 8 Ultra Edition. Nero has slowed down its feature-adding space race to make some

welcome, fundamental changes. The software is much more intuitive now. Existing features have been improved. And the new capabilities are ones that customers have been clamoring for.

## A Smarter StartSmart

Nero tamed its tangle of applications a while back with its StartSmart launcher. Now StartSmart has been completely overhauled with a friendlier tabbed interface (and no more scrolling to find what you're looking for). Even better, you can now do most of your copying, ripping, and burning operations in StartSmart without having to launch another application.

Speaking of which, Nero's applications now launch almost twice as fast. And this new speed doesn't depend on one of those "terminate-and-stay resident" programs that starts up with Windows and clutters up the icon area by the clock.

Nero 8 makes it much easier to set favorites for the applications you use

## What About Vista?

Nero's support for Vista continues to improve. Reprising its role in Nero 7 is a Sidebar Gadget that offers one-click disc burning.

Nero's disaster recovery is also much improved for Vista. It will now back up personal file locations (such as Documents and Music) by default. Nero also makes a bootable Linux recovery disc with a GUI (graphical user interface). This not only allows a full, "clean boot" recovery of a Vista system but also gives the frazzled user an easy-to-understand interface. ●







most. The new StartSmart even has an RSS reader. By default, it informs you of Nero updates and tips, but you can set it to gather other feeds as you like.

### I Want It Back

Nero's new RescueAgent utility recovers data deleted or lost from CD/DVD, USB drives, and hard drives. This is terrific news for anyone who's ever added data to a half-full disc, only to see the previously burned data "disappear" because of an incorrect multisession setting. If the media is damaged or scratched, you won't be able to recoup all of the data, but RescueAgent will recover as much as possible.

### I Can See It Now

With Nero 8, it's a snap to upload your videos to YouTube, MySpace, and your My Nero account (see the "My Nero" sidebar in this article). The company is working to support other video-sharing and social networking sites, too.

Besides DVDs and CDs, Nero 8 can author and burn Blu-ray Discs. It also can play high-def AVCHD and BD-AV formats in its Nero Showtime player. And with a plug-in, it can play and later burn HD DVDs, although this is subject to the eventual availability of HD DVD burners. In case you haven't yet made the move to 1080p high-def, Nero 8 will be ready when you are.

As for regular DVD authoring, version 8 has a revamped menu creation process that allows for more complex navigation schemes. It also includes some very neat new animated 3D menus. What's more, now you can populate your DVD menus with text titles instead of buttons, if you like.

The new Rich Preview and Live Icon features let you see and hear what are in your A/V files before you add them to your disc. A motion preview beats a

## Disc Burning Is Just The Beginning

Here's just a sampling of the things Nero 8 Ultra Edition can do. Note that you must have suitable hardware for some of these features, such as BD/HD DVD movie playback and media streaming.

- Easily edit and upload videos to YouTube, MySpace, and My Nero (others to follow)
- Play DVD, BD-AV, HD DVD, and AVCHD video
- Burn and rip non-copy-protected CDs, DVDs, BDs, and HD DVDs (HD DVD is read only with current drives)
- Rip audio files from video
- Recover data from damaged discs and other storage devices
- Move AV files to your iPod or other mobile device
- Organize and edit your photos, then turn them into slideshows with audio
- Stream video, music, photos, and slideshows from your PC to your Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3
- Record TV on your PC like a DVR
- Label LightScribe and LabelFlash discs with text, photos, and graphics
- Mix and edit music tracks with loops, samples, and surround sound
- And much, much more

## My Nero

It doesn't cost you a thing to sign up for the My Nero community ([my.nero.com](http://my.nero.com)), but it's well worth your while. You'll be able to download new artwork and video clips other users have created and use them in your media projects. In turn, you'll also be able to share your content with other users. ●

thumbnail anyway, as it can save you a lot of time you'd normally spend hunting for just the right clip.

Nero knows that you're not tied to your PC, or even to your home. That's why Nero 8 supports a wide range of mobile devices, from iPods to PSPs. It can convert your video to formats compatible with these and other portable players so you can take your entertainment wherever you go.

Plenty of users have asked for an easy way to extract the soundtrack from a video clip and save it as an audio file. (Hey, those "Family Guy" quote compilations don't just appear out of nowhere.) Once again, thankfully, Nero 8 delivers.

Like version 7, the new Nero lets you mix your own music tracks and record live TV to your hard drive like a TiVo. It can even stream the multimedia files on your PC to your UPnP (Universal Plug and Play) home-theater equipment, such as an Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3, over a network. The MediaHome streaming application now can blend in with your living room decor a little better, too, with TV menu color options other than the traditional Nero red.

## Ongoing Support

Nero is famous for providing free updates every month or two to accommodate new products and correct issues. Version 8 of the software

streamlines the updating process so it's easier to use, which means you'll be more likely to install the latest features and fixes. Any update to version 8 will be free for you to download, just as existing Nero 7 users can get version 7 updates at no charge.

Nero's SecurDisc goes beyond other typical disc encryption programs by requiring special hardware support in the burner, which makes the password protection or digital signature scheme harder to crack. The SecurDisc feature also improves the chances that you'll be able to recover data should a disc become damaged. Compatible drives have to date been scarce, but the company says that certain models from LG ([us.lge.com](http://us.lge.com)) now support SecurDisc.

In case all this seems a little overwhelming, take heart. You'll find helpful Flash tutorials on Nero's Web site ([www.nero.com](http://www.nero.com)) to help you learn how to do just about anything the software makes possible.

## Cost & Compatibility

Nero 8 Ultra Edition runs on Windows 2000 SP4/XP SP1/XP Media Center 2005/2003 Server SP1 and Vista Home/Business/Ultimate, as well as 64-bit versions of WinXP Pro and Vista. (A couple of features don't work in Vista, and on 64-bit OSes some applications run in 32-bit emulation mode.)

The software suite is available as a \$79.99 download (actually a serial number to activate the free trial download) or a \$99.99 retail package in a new, redesigned box. Folks who purchase the retail version will receive 10 days of free phone support when they register the software. With some time restrictions, existing users of Nero 7 can upgrade for \$49.99, so double-check before you head to the checkout counter. It's time to start burning. **FC**



# ce news

COMPILED BY JENNIE SCHLUETER

## Nokia Announces New Phones & Services

Nokia ([www.nokia.com](http://www.nokia.com)) has announced the name for its new Internet services brand name: Ovi. The new moniker refers to Nokia's music store and N-Gage, where users can download music and games from their mobile devices or PCs. On-the-go users will also appreciate Ovi's Nokia Maps, a navigation service that offers maps and more.

Ovi was introduced at the same time as four new mobile devices, the Nokia N81, Nokia N95, Nokia 5310 XpressMusic, and Nokia 5610 XpressMusic, which were designed with a focus on entertainment, music, and games. Each device features more memory, better battery performance, larger screens than previous models, and they have music or gaming keys. The Nokia N81 with SD card (\$529), N81 8GB (\$629), and N95 (\$799) are currently available, and the XpressMusic line of phones should be available stateside in early 2008.



## Kodak's New Hi-Def Products

Kodak ([www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)) has several new products aimed at satisfying consumers' current craving for all things high-definition. The company recently debuted three new digital cameras that can capture HD video and a new HD dock to view photos on a high-def TV. The HDTV Dock (\$99.99)

comes with a remote control and will display still photos in high definition and play video in 720p. The Z812 IS (\$299.95) can snap HD-quality photos and 720p video. The other two HD cameras, the V1253 (\$299.95) and V1233 (\$249.95), are 12MP models that can also record video in 720p.

## Apple Tweaks Product Lines & Prices



Having sold more than 100 million iPods and more than 1 million iPhones, it's easy to see that Steve Jobs and the gang are really on to something. But some recent changes to its product lineups mean Apple ([www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)) still thinks there's room for improvement. In September, the company introduced the iPod touch, which uses the same touchscreen interface as the iPhone. The Wi-Fi-enabled touch has a 3.5-inch screen and comes in two configurations: 8GB (\$299) and 16GB (\$399). (See

"Which MP3 Player Is Best For You?" on page 76 for more information on the touch.)

The touch product announcement was accompanied by the news that Apple was reducing the price of its 8GB iPhone from \$599 to \$399 and dropping the 4GB iPhone altogether. The price drop came just two months after the iPhone became available for purchase, angering many consumers. In response to the outcry, Apple offered its early iPhone adopters a \$100 store credit.

## Belkin Bands For The Cure

Belkin ([www.belkin.com](http://www.belkin.com)) announced in September that it would donate 10% of the retail price of its Sport Armband (\$24.99) and Remix Metal (\$24.99) case for the iPod nano to the Susan G. Komen For The Cure foundation. That works out to be \$3 for the foundation with every sale of the Sport Armband and Remix Metal case. The Sport Armband carries the iPod nano that straps to a person's arm while exercising. The Remix Metal case offers a new look for iPod nano users. Both products feature the pink ribbon that has come to represent the fight against cancer.



## Yahoo! Mail Adds Text Messaging Service

The free Web-based email market is a competitive one, and Yahoo! ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)) recently upped the ante with the addition of its text messaging capability. Now, a Yahoo! Mail user can log in to her email account, click a contact, and send either a text message, instant message, or email. The software allows people to reach each other even on the road by sending the message to a cell phone. Parents will like

being able to text their kids from a keyboard without having to pick at letters on a small device. The ability to communicate three ways from one site is also an advantage. The text messaging capability is just one of several new features, including a more comprehensive email search engine and a contacts database that's easier to read and edit, added to Yahoo! Mail.

# YAHOO!®

## Television & Internet On Almost Equal Entertainment Footing

Once considered a tool of the trade for geeks and government officials, the Internet has now taken its place next to the television as a primary source of consumer entertainment. A survey conducted by the IBM Institute for Business Value found that respondents spend almost as much time using the Internet as watching television. 66% reported watching one to four hours per day of television, while 60% spent the same amount of personal time online.

In addition to the amount of time spent online, the survey found a steady growth in the number of consumers using digital entertainment devices and services. 23% reported using a portable music service such as iTunes, 7% have a video content subscription for their cell phones, 11% subscribe to a PC-based music service, and 18% have an online newspaper subscription.

The IBM survey was conducted from mid-April through mid-June 2007. Respondents were aged 18 and older and from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Japan.



## Consumers Say "I Do" To The iPhone

The Apple iPhone has only been on the market for a few short months, but it has already made quite an impression. In July, the iPhone accounted for 1.8% of all mobile handset unit sales to U.S. consumers.

According to an iSuppli U.S. Consumer Panel Survey, 57% of the U.S. consumers who bought iPhones in July were 35 years old or younger, and 52% of those purchasers were men. iSuppli projections in September maintain that sales of the iPhone will continue to rise, with 4.5 million units shipping in 2007 and 30 million units shipping in 2011.

Worldwide iPhone Shipment Forecast

2007	4.5 million
2008	15 million
2009	20 million
2010	25 million
2011	30 million

## tidbits

In an August national telephone survey conducted by Sirius and XM, 70% of the respondents would be pleased with a "best of both" plan that gives customers channels from both providers.



Source: Sirius



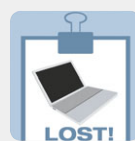
The back-to-school stretch from July 15 through Aug. 18, saw notebook sales increase by 24% in units and 11% in dollars. The average selling price was down 10%.

Source: The NPD Group

A recent survey showed 24% of U.S. respondents said they own a DVR and watch at least 50% of television programming on replay.



Source: IBM



73% of corporations in a recent study report the loss or theft of an off-network device, such as a notebook, in the last two years.

Source: Ponemon Institute

Market researchers are predicting that LCDs will be the king of the digital television market in 2011, enjoying a 75% market share while the plasma TV shares are expected to shrink to less than 15%.



Source: In-Stat



# Make The Connection

Hook Up Your HDTV  
To The HD Sources It Needs

Toshiba HD-A30 HD DVD Player  
\$399.99 • [www.tacp.toshiba.com](http://www.tacp.toshiba.com)



Having taken the plunge to buy a shiny, new HDTV, avoid making a common mistake amongst newcomers to the HD scene: forgetting to provide a high-definition source for your new television set. Although your HDTV will be more than capable of displaying SDTV (standard-definition television), it really shows

its stuff when connected to one of the three sources for HD programming.

HDTVs display a picture with up to 1,080 vertical lines of resolution in contrast to SDTV's 480 lines of resolution. When viewing true HD content, the result is a sharper image with richer colors than you'll experience with SD

content. Many of today's HDTVs can up-convert an SDTV signal or a standard DVD to an HD resolution, but the resulting quality depends on the original source material. In most cases, the end

result will pale in comparison to true HD content. Instead, focus on finding the best HD programming in your area, which is usually available via OTA (over the air) with an antenna, from a cable or

satellite subscription service, or from BDs (Blu-ray Discs) and HD DVDs. **RG**

BY CHRIS JACKSON

## OTA

Viewers in some areas are surprised to find that HD programming is available free as an OTA (over-the-air) broadcast. Most major networks broadcast HD, digital signals that you can receive with a traditional TV antenna. Depending on how far you live from the transmitter and how many signal-blocking obstructions exist, OTA may be the quickest and most affordable way to connect your new HDTV to the programming it's designed for.

**Things to know.** As part of the migration to HD, most local broadcasters are required to make their programming available as unencrypted OTA broadcasts. Also, OTA broadcasts are immune to some of the problems that plagued SDTV broadcasts; snow, jittering, and other anomalies are a thing of the past. Instead, your signal will either come in, or you'll just see a black screen.

**What you need.** Not all HDTVs have an ATSC tuner, although salespeople are legally obligated to tell you if the TV you're buying doesn't have one. Check your TV's manual to see if it does; if so, chances are it's integrated. If it doesn't, you'll need to buy an ATSC tuner to receive OTA broadcasts. Also, you'll need an antenna. Determine what type of antenna will work best by visiting Best Buy's Guide to TV Antennas at [www.bestbuy.com/site/olspage.jsp?id=pcmcat91800050029&type=category](http://www.bestbuy.com/site/olspage.jsp?id=pcmcat91800050029&type=category). Finally, you'll need a coaxial cable to connect your antenna to your HDTV's input.

## Satellite/Cable

Cable and satellite providers, such as Cox Cable or DirecTV, were some of the first pioneers in providing HD content with trailblazing programs, such as HDNet. Depending on your provider, you may be able to access dozens of HD channels at an affordable cost.

**Things to know.** Digital doesn't mean HD. Most cable companies have migrated from analog cable to a digital system to increase the number of channels they can offer you. Don't make the mistake of thinking that digital cable will automatically provide you with an HD picture. You'll typically need to subscribe to an HD package to receive HD programming. In addition, some cable providers compress their HD signal (again to increase the number of channels they can provide), resulting in an image that, while HD, isn't quite as pristine as other sources such as OTA broadcasts.

**What you need.** Receiving an HD signal will usually require a digital set-top box from your provider. Cable companies often lease these for nominal fees, and the boxes often include a DVR, as well. Satellite providers are also providing creative ways for you to finance the purchase of an HD-capable satellite receiver. In addition to the set-top box, you'll need either an HDMI cable or a set of component cables to connect your HDTV to the set-top box. Set-top boxes also eliminate the need for an ATSC tuner if you have an older HDTV set that lacks an integrated tuner.

## HD DVD/BD

Two of the most promising technologies for HD content are BDs (Blu-ray Discs) and HD DVDs. Both are aiming to supplant DVD as the medium of choice for HD content on a disc. BDs and HD DVDs use a small optical disc that stores movies with elaborate bonus features in the finest of HD quality. Imagine all the features you've become accustomed to with DVD, then double the picture quality; that's what BD and HD DVD promise.

**Things to know.** Like the VHS and Betamax wars that roiled the home-video landscape decades ago, the BD/HD DVD conflict threatens to stall any adoption until a compromise between the two formats is resolved. The problem? Each format is currently incompatible with the other; although there are hybrid players capable of playing both types of discs, these are more expensive than standalone players.

**What you need.** Once you've decided on which format, you'll need a player and movies to view. In addition to buying the movies, most video rental companies, such as Netflix ([www.netflix.com](http://www.netflix.com)) and Blockbuster ([www.blockbuster.com](http://www.blockbuster.com)), are now carrying one or both of the formats for many titles in their catalogs. You'll also need an HDMI cable or a set of component cables to connect the player to your HDTV.

# DVD Recorders

Fun & Affordable



LG DR-787T  
\$199.99 • [us.lge.com](http://us.lge.com)

**A** standalone DVD recorder is like a VCR, only with recordable DVDs instead of tapes.

With a DVD recorder, you can record sporting events and miniseries directly to disc, just as you used to do with video-cassettes. Unlike a DVR (digital video recorder), such as a TiVo, which uses a hard drive to store a finite amount of TV, the only limit on your DVD recorder is the number of discs you buy. You can archive episodes of your favorite TV shows, whereas with a DVR you'd be limited to the available drive space. To record a new show on a DVR's full hard drive, you'd have to delete something else first. (Some DVRs have DVD recorders built in.)

Typically, a 4.7GB DVD will hold one or two hours of top-quality video. However, you can record at lower quality levels to fit more video on a disc. Blank DVDs cost less than 20 cents per disc in bulk.

DVD recorders let you use formats such as DVD+R, DVD-R, DVD+RW, and DVD-RW but may require particular types for certain uses (such as DVD+RW or DVD-RAM for copy-controlled broadcasts). Rewriteable (DVD+RW) discs are useful for recording daytime shows you plan to watch at night. We suggest that you use disc formats that play back in every DVD player and drive you own. You may need to tell your recorder to finalize certain discs before they'll work in other players.

Of course, a DVD recorder also acts as a standalone player. Some of the better models even perform upconversion techniques to make DVDs look their best on an HDTV, which has higher pixel resolution than DVD-Video.

Depending on the recorder's inputs, you should be able to move shows from your standalone DVR/VCR to DVD. You might even be able to hook up your camcorder to your DVD recorder to transfer home movies to disc. **PG**

BY MARTY SEMS

## What You Give Up

**D**VD recorders don't require a monthly subscription like a TiVo. Then again, you won't be able to use the special channel listings and Web-based programming services companies such as TiVo provide.

You'll be able to watch one TV channel as you

record another with your DVD recorder, although you won't be able to watch another show you've previously recorded while you record something else, as you can with a DVR. However, you may be able to timeshift using a DVD-RAM disc, meaning to

watch an earlier part of a program you're currently recording.

You also won't be able to copy commercial DVDs. However, in our tests with some DVD recorders, we were able to record some (but not most) commercial movies from a VHS player. ●



# Getting The Right HDMI Cables

## Untangle The Confusion

**Y**ou have purchased a beautiful HDTV and a state-of-the-art HD DVD player, thereby launching yourself into a higher echelon of technological sophistication and media enjoyment. All that is left for you to do is buy HDMI cables to connect your machines.

HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) offers superior-quality audio and video through a single cable and is compatible with most HDTVs. However, with so many versions available (1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.2a, 1.3, 1.3a, or 1.3b), it can be confusing to determine which one to purchase. To compound the problem, you have to decide which *type* of HDMI cable you need (Type A, Type B, or Type C).

### Which Version?

While every iteration of HDMI cable has new features, such as increased audio support for SACD (Super Audio CD) or increased bandwidth, you can rest easy knowing that all HDMI cables are

backward-compatible, meaning that any new versions will work with any device that supports older versions of HDMI. For example, if you buy a new HDMI cable in a year or two to use with the HDTV you presently own, they will be compatible.

Be aware that if you purchase a new HDTV or other audio/visual equipment, you may need to buy new HDMI cables to ensure that all of its features are supported, such as surround-sound audio formats (Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio) for Blu-ray Disc and HD DVD players which are available as of HDMI version 1.3. Fortunately, HDMI cables are made to run the next generation of high-definition technology, so odds are that your old cables will be more than sufficient.

### Which Type?

The type of HDMI cable you need depends on what devices you will be running. Type A cables are used mostly with

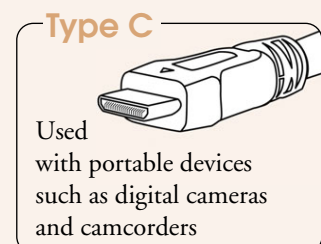
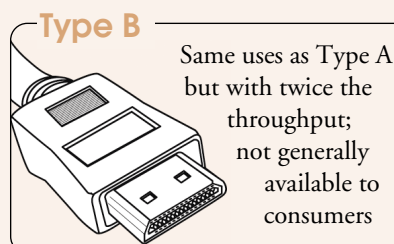
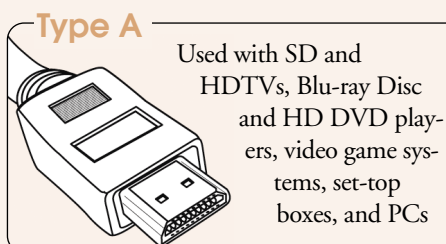
HDTVs, video game systems, and Blu-ray Disc and HD DVD players, while Type C cables are intended more for digital cameras and camcorders. Type B cables are not currently manufactured for general consumer use.

If the packaging in the store does not indicate which type of cable it contains, simply inspect the cable ends to differentiate between Types A and C. Type A cables have two ends that are the same size (19 pins, 13.9 x 4.45mm) while the ends of Type C cables are different sizes (19 pins, 10.42 x 2.42mm and 19 pins, 13.9 x 4.45mm). See the "HDMI Cables Side-By-Side" sidebar to see what type of connectors you should look for.

Basically, if you are purchasing HDMI cables for any purpose other than a digital camera or camcorder, you will want the latest version of Type A cabling, which should easily support all the features on your new HDTV and HD DVD player. **FG**

BY SETH COLANER

## HDMI Cables Side-By-Side



# Who's Afraid Of The Dark?

## A Comparison Of Black Levels In HDTVs

**T**here are few images as frightening as a movie villain leaping from the dark, dank shadows of an alley to attack a helpless victim. But would the scene be as terrifying if the “dark” looked more like a foggy afternoon in London than the black of night in Gotham? Such is the woe of many HDTV owners who purchase a set with bad black levels.

### What Are Black Levels?

Simply put, the **black level** is the level of brightness at the darkest part of a visual image on your screen. When whites are their whitest and blacks are their blackest, you get the highest-quality picture. On HDTVs with poor

black levels, the black portions of the screen, such as the background of scrolling movie credits, can look dark gray instead of black. The appearance of these levels can change depending upon the amount of light in the room—some HDTVs look better in the dark and some look better in more brightly lit areas.

### Which Type Of HDTV Has The Best Black Levels?

Here are the rankings in order from best to worst:

**CRT**—Cathode-ray tube; this is your father’s television—the one with the big tube taking up space behind the set—only in high definition. This has always

been the standard by which to judge black levels in other HDTVs.

**Plasma**—10-year-old consumer technology that consistently produces high-quality black levels.

**LCoS**—Liquid Crystal on Silicone; an upstart technology that has developed over the past few years; it has excellent black levels.

**DLP**—Digital Light Processing; still not bad as far as black levels are concerned.

**LCD**—Liquid Crystal Display; although it is improving rapidly, LCDs tend to look more gray than black.

### The Bottom Line

The type of HDTV you should buy depends on where and how it will be used. For example, if you are only going to watch your HDTV in a darkened room, a plasma or CRT would be best—you will be able to see the gray in the LCD picture easily in such an environment. However, if you are mostly a daytime viewer, you may be unable to tell the difference between LCD and plasma black levels at all.

Remember, you will live with this HDTV for years; choose the one with the black levels that best suit your home. Next, buy a good vampire movie and wait for the killer to jump out of the well-calibrated shadows. **FG**

## Side-By-Side Comparison

**B**elow are two screenshots, one with very nice, rich blacks and the other with black levels that look gray. Where you view your HDTV dictates how much of that grayish hue you can tolerate. If your movie watching occurs in a dark room, any deficiencies in the black levels will be pronounced; if much of your television and movie experiences happen in a bright living room, you won’t notice the grays nearly as much. The key is to scope out the HDTV you want to buy in whatever lighting simulation is closest to your home environment. ●





# Your Home Theater Go-To Guys

## Best Buy's Home Theater Installation Services

**B**ack in the day, setting up a TV was a cinch, but it's more complicated now. Best Buy's Geek Squad Home Theater Installation lets you sit back and envision your ultimate viewing and listening environment, while leaving the design, configuration, and installation to the Geek Squad's trained experts.

### In-Home Consultation

The Geek Squad offers an in-home consultation service. Schedule an appointment by calling 1-800-GEEK SQUAD (1-800-433-5778) or by visiting your local Best Buy and speaking to a customer specialist.

The Geeks spend roughly an hour helping you build your dream A/V system. The experts perform a preliminary walkthrough of your home, discussing with you the possibilities and offering advice on choosing products that meet your needs. The cost of the service, which includes a detailed estimate of costs and a diagram of the proposed layout, is \$100. If you buy your equipment at Best Buy and spend more than \$499, you can apply the cost of your consultation toward the purchase.

**In-store experience.** Many Best Buy stores feature a Magnolia demo room, in which you'll see and hear what a high-performance home-theater setup should look and sound like in a comfortable living room-like setting. A Geek Squad expert will ascertain what it is that you want

### Available Services

**G**eek Squad offers a range of flexible and comprehensive services to help you realize your ideal home-theater system.

- Consultation
- Delivery and setup
- TV mounting
- Speaker installation
- Universal remotes
- Extras

from your home-theater system. They'll also make sure you'll have the proper cables and accessories to make it work, as well as ensure you're informed about the product. For instance, if you purchase a new HDTV, the Geek Squad can inform you about the local availability of digital cable, satellite, and over-the-air services.

**In-home installation.** The Geek Squad's basic TV And Video setup costs \$150 and includes the plugging in, configuration, and set up of three select video components. Add audio integration for another \$50, bringing the Home Theater Setup to \$200. Other services, such as calibration, remote control programming, and stand assembly, are available, as well.

### One-Stop Shop

You already know that you can get the products you want at Best Buy, and now you know that you can get it all

### Price Breakdown

**G**eek Squad offers a fairly complete list of professional installation services that feature a clear pricing scheme so you can make sure you get a system that fits your lifestyle and your budget.

- In-home system design and layout consultation: \$100
- TV And Video setup: \$150
- Home Theater setup: \$200
- Flat-panel TV and projector mounting
  - 20 inches and under: \$300
  - 21 to 32 inches: \$400
  - 33 inches and up: \$500
  - Front projector: \$600
- In-wall speaker installation
  - One speaker: \$100
  - Three speakers: \$200
  - Five speakers: \$300
  - Up to seven speakers: \$400
- Universal remote programming
  - Harmony remote: \$150
  - Other universal remote: \$300

installed and configured to your liking with the help of Best Buy's Geek Squad Home Theater Installation service. Perhaps the most important aspect of the service is that the Geek Squad experts will teach you to become the expert of your own home theater. **FG**

BY ANDREW LEIBMAN

# Home-Theater Shopping Tips

## HDMI Cables

BY MARTY SEMS

**Y**ou wouldn't cook a sumptuous meal, serve it on your wedding china, and expect your guests to eat it with plastic flatware, would you? By the same token, you don't want to fumble the ball at the goal line when it comes to your new HDTV.

An expensive TV won't look very good if you funnel programming to it through an inferior, analog video cable. To get the absolute best picture on your new HDTV, use a top-quality HDMI audio/video cable from your local Best Buy store. (See "Getting The Right HDMI Cables" on page 21 for an explanation of HDMI.)

The number of cables you'll need depends on the number of HDMI devices you need to connect. If only your BD (Blu-ray Disc)/HD DVD player and HDTV have HDMI ports, you'll need one HDMI cable. If you want to connect an HDMI audio receiver in between, buy two cables.

Better HDMI 1.3 cables are called High-Speed (category 2). These can easily transport 1080p video at 120Hz refresh rates to compatible TVs. However, if your HDTV is a 1080i or 720p set, you can get by with a Standard (category 1) cable. Not all HDMI cables are labeled, however, so you may have to look for ones that mention support for 1080p or 340MHz speeds if you want High-Speed (category 2) cables. Also, HDMI.org mentions that any cable under 6 feet long might handle High-Speed (category 2) demands.

Likewise, virtually any HDMI cable should be able to carry 8-channel/192kHz/24-bit audio. This

includes the new formats available on Blu-ray Disc and HD DVD movie discs such as Dolby Digital Plus. An HDMI 1.1 or 1.2 cable can carry Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio that has been decoded by a BD or HD DVD player, but there may be a slight quality drop in the conversion to the LPCM (linear pulse code modulation) format. To export Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio to an HDMI-equipped receiver to be decoded losslessly, you'll need a cable that supports HDMI version 1.3, 1.3a, or 1.3b.

The same holds true if your new HDTV can display Deep Color video with 30-bit (also known as 10-bit [10 times RGB's three colors]), 36-bit (12-bit), or 48-bit (16-bit) color depths. If an HDMI cable package doesn't mention a version number, look for HDMI 1.3/1.3a clues such as "Supports Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio" or "Supports 30-bit Deep Color."

Even if your current home-theater equipment doesn't support everything HDMI 1.3/1.3a makes possible (many of the specification's new features are optional), at least you won't have to replace your cables when you upgrade to more powerful home-theater electronics later on, such as a 1440p HDTV.

### SHOPPING CHECKLIST

#### ☐ What is the HDMI speed rating?

- ☐ Standard (category 1), 1080i
- ☐ High-Speed (category 2), 1080p

#### ☐ What version of HDMI does the cable support?

- ☐ 1.1 (supports DVD-Audio)
- ☐ 1.2/1.2a (supports SACD [Super Audio CD] audio)
- ☐ 1.3/1.3a/1.3b (supports external Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD decoding, 120Hz video refresh, Deep Color, automatic audio/video synchronization, etc.)

#### ☐ How many feet long do you need the cable to be?

- |                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 8  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 16 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 25 |

#### ☐ How long is the warranty?

- ☐ One year
- ☐ Five years
- ☐ Lifetime

#### ☐ Notes

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CUT HERE

# HDTVs

## 5 Must-Have Accessories



**1** Invariably, as you head toward the HDTV section of your local consumer electronics store, you'll walk right past shelves of bland-looking HDTV accessories. Sure, these accessories have multichannel audio, gold-plated connectors, nitrogen-injected insulation, and fully-articulating mounting arms, but they just can't compete visually with their big-screen, flat-panel HDTV counterparts. Despite outward appearances, however, there are a handful of accessories that are vital to getting the most from your HDTV.

**1 HDMI cables.** We're guessing neither you nor your wife want bundles of wires and cords snaking around the living room, and those nests of wires are attractive nuisances for your children and pets. HDMI cables are all-in-one cords that carry uncompressed digital audio and digital video signals to and from your HDTV and its components, eliminating the need for separate cords for video and audio. Rocketfish's 4-foot HDMI cable (\$64.99; [www.rocketfishproducts.com](http://www.rocketfishproducts.com)) is the perfect accessory to pass your digital signals—nicely and neatly—among your devices. Be sure to budget for this must-have.

**2 Wall mount.** Mounting your new HDTV on a wall will show it to its greatest advantage, and a swivel mount will let you adjust the position of the television so you see it from its best viewing angle. A wall-mounted HDTV also clears a bit of floor space and keeps your living room or home theater neat and clutter-free. Before hanging the wall mount and installing the television, make sure your theater recliners and couches are positioned where you'll be happy with them for a while so you don't have to drill new holes in the walls every time you want to rearrange the furniture.

**3 Stand.** If you'd rather not drill holes in your family room's newly painted walls or if your walls are made of cement or cinderblock, a stand is probably a better option than a wall mount. Today's A/V furniture manufacturers offer gorgeous, showroom-style stands in a variety of materials, including warm wood (available in many stains), minimalist brushed steel, and clean-looking glass. You can get a triangular corner model, a high-backed cabinet that includes a mount for flat-panel HDTVs, and a rack with adjustable shelves to accommodate the rest of your A/V gear.

**4 Surround-sound system.** We're willing to bet that you've struggled with keeping volume levels steady when you're watching something on TV. There's nothing more annoying than being startled by a loud commercial in the middle of your favorite show; likewise, nothing is more jolting than when a quiet, serene part of your favorite movie is suddenly interrupted by a too-loud scene change. Eliminate this by investing in a good-quality surround-sound system, which will prevent volume extremes by automatically equalizing the audio in movies and HD broadcasts that are capable of 5.1 or better surround sound.

**5 Universal remote.** Let's face it: No one—not your mom, dad, grandma, or even the kids—can figure out the remotes when there's a different one for each component in your home-theater system. Consolidate the controls for your various devices with a programmable universal remote, which lets you control everything with a single device. The Logitech Harmony 880 Advanced Universal Remote (\$249.99; [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)) lets you control 15 devices at once. Better still, you'll keep your living room clean and clutter-free. **PG**

BY ANDREW LEIBMAN



# Buying An HDTV

## Top 5 Things To Know

**B**uying an HDTV is a big decision. There are myriad options and plenty of accessory choices. And let's face it—you're spending a whole lot of money. Here we identify the five most important things to consider when shopping for the right set.

**1 Buy quality cables.** Very few home-theater components, including the most expensive televisions and DVD players, come with high-quality cables. Plan to spend an extra hundred dollars or so purchasing cables, such as HDMI, DVI, and component cables, for the highest-resolution formats each device

can support. HDMI, the newest cable option, will eliminate cord tangles with a single cord that connects your DVD player or digital television receiver to your HDTV. It supports all high-definition resolutions (720p, 1080i, etc.) while maintaining a digital signal throughout the process. Whatever option you select, don't settle for buying the cheapest or shortest cable on the shelf. Low-quality construction invites electrical interference and unreliable connections, and the cables may not withstand normal wear and tear as well as more expensive ones.

**2 Don't hang it yourself.** In most cases, it's best to hire a professional to hang your HDTV. A successful wall mount on regular drywall requires the right bracket, a correct wall stud alignment, and a reliable attachment between the TV and its bracket. Brick or cinderblock walls provide an even greater installation challenge. Most electronics retailers offer affordable installation services and usually guarantee their work. So, unless you're willing to bet your big new investment on your carpentry skills, bring in the experts.

**3 Make yourself at home.** Your living room setup isn't the same as a warehouse filled with walls of shimmering TV sets. In order to get the most realistic impressions of HDTVs at the store, take advantage of retailers' efforts to re-create home environments. Try to preview your prospective TV in these settings and bring a few of your favorite movies to see how they look on your set before making any final decisions.

**4 Size it up.** Finding a set that works in your room is a crucial part of your purchase. A small room and a couch near the TV means you should invest in a fairly small HDTV; a larger space with plenty of seating for friends and family requires a bigger screen. To calculate your optimal screen size, use the three-to-five rule. Measure the distance, in feet, from your TV's location to your viewing position. Multiply that number by three, and then by five. Those numbers represent the minimum and maximum screen sizes, measured in inches diagonally, for that space. For example, a 10-foot span from your TV to sofa will accommodate screens between 30 and 50 inches.

**5 Fine-tune color.** There's more to brilliant, sharp pictures than screen resolution; color reproduction and calibration make a big difference, too. When you're browsing HDTVs at a retailer, be sure the colors are consistently true to life. Blacks shouldn't appear gray, bright areas shouldn't wash detail away, and high-paced action scenes shouldn't have jagged edges. Calibration is another important factor to keep in mind; this will ensure your HDTV's settings will be far better than the showroom settings many televisions ship with. Most retailers offer professional calibration (such as Best Buy's Magnolia Home Theater Optimization package) that uses special equipment otherwise unavailable to consumers; in most cases, such calibration is your best bet. However, there are calibration DVDs that can walk you through the process yourself. **FC**

BY GREGORY ANDERSON



# Plasma & LCD TVs

## What's The Difference?



lat-panel televisions continue to top electronics shoppers' wish lists. However, plasma and LCD sets are based on two very different technologies, so knowing their advantages and disadvantages will help you make an informed decision about which to bring home. **FC**

BY BRIAN HODGE

### Plasma

#### Pros

- Because plasma TVs are based on phosphorescent-screen technology, their pictures most resemble those of tube TVs in terms of brightness, color depth and shading, and picture clarity.
- Plasma still has the edge over LCDs on contrast ratio (often as high as 10,000:1), black levels, and reproducing subtle color shadings, particularly in dim scenes.
- Pixel response is very rapid, so fast-moving imagery shouldn't blur.
- Plasma sets are generally more affordable in larger screen sizes—say, over 50 inches.
- Although this is a more subjective evaluation, many viewers find that plasma sets do a better job of scaling up lower-resolution standard-definition TV signals.

#### Cons

- Some plasmas consume more electricity and put out much more heat during use than LCDs.
- At higher altitudes (above 6,500 feet), lower air pressure can cause the set to produce a buzzing noise similar to a neon sign.
- Although it's less likely now than with older sets, plasmas (usually cheaper, low-quality models) can still be susceptible to burn-in from static images such as stock-ticker bars and video-game gauges.
- With sets of equivalent size, plasmas are much heavier than LCDs, which can affect plans for wall mounting, and they can also be harder for one person to move.

#### Plasma Is Best For:

- Movie buffs
- Sports fanatics
- Viewers shopping for a large set
- Viewers prepared to pay for professional installation

### LCD

#### Pros

- LCDs run cooler and often require less power to operate than plasma TVs.
- LCDs use a screen coating that reflects little ambient light, so glare and washout aren't a problem even under bright lighting conditions.
- There's no chance of image burn-in.
- Many LCD TVs have PC-compatible connections so the set can double as a computer monitor.
- With a few exceptions, LCD is your main choice for sets 40 inches and under. Most new under-40-inch plasmas come from off-brands that may be more of a gamble than sets from the major names.

#### Cons

- Pixel response may be a tad slower than plasma, so fast-moving imagery might blur.
- New LCDs may have stuck pixels, which show up as bright pinpoints of light. And a hard rap on the screen may break crystals and leave a permanent dark spot.
- True blacks can be difficult to reproduce because the fluorescent backlight still shines through the pixel grid (although some of the newest models are starting to address this by turning off the backlight in select screen areas).
- After a few years of use, the aging backlight may shift color somewhat, forcing the user to recalibrate the set.

#### LCD Is Best For:

- Avid gamers
- Viewers with brightly lit rooms
- Viewers shopping for a smaller set
- Viewers who want to do their own no-fuss installation
- Computer users

# HDTV Glossary

**B** alderdash! OK, HDTV jargon isn't *that* bad, but there are a few terms every shopper should know. Here's your cheat sheet.

**aspect ratio**—Put simply, it's the shape of the TV's screen. An HDTV has a wider picture than a traditional TV of the same vertical screen height. An HDTV has a 16:9 aspect ratio, meaning that if its screen were 16 inches wide, it would be 9 inches tall. A regular 4:3 TV screen would be 12 inches wide at the same 9-inch height.

**HDMI**—High-Definition Multimedia Interface is a new type of cable connection. It can carry both high-resolution video and uncompressed, multichannel audio among HDTVs, home-theater systems, and other components. HDMI cables are pricy, but they maintain top picture and sound quality.

**HD tuner**—Some more expensive HDTVs include a built-in tuner for receiving local high-def broadcast TV channels. Your TV doesn't need an HD tuner if you have cable or satellite service. Separate HD tuners and antennas are available for HDTVs without them.

**interlaced**—When an HDTV displays an interlaced image, as in 1080i or 720i resolutions, it really shows you every other horizontal line of a frame of video (called a field) at a time. Sixty times a second, the TV displays the other field of the frame, meaning the lines not shown in the previous field. Interlaced video can seem to flicker and cause moving objects on-screen to have blurred edges.

**LCD**—Like a notebook's screen, a liquid-crystal display HDTV uses a fluid crystal



substance to form pixels of color in front of a backlight. LCDs may not be able to match plasma TVs' deep black and gray areas, but they're lighter, sometimes less fragile, and considered easier to set up. LCDs also are catching up to plasmas in size and price and are expected to supplant them in the market.

**plasma**—Plasma TVs use a tiny tube of gas for each pixel. Electricity makes each pixel glow. Plasmas are still available in bigger sizes than LCDs and create deeper blacks and sometimes brighter colors. However, older or less expensive models can also suffer permanent screen damage if an unchanging image is displayed too long, such as a TV channel's stock ticker or parts of certain video games.

**progressive scan**—A TV showing a progressively scanned image, as in 1080p or 720p resolutions, displays a full frame of video (both odd-lined and even-lined fields) all at once. Progressive-scan

video looks sharper and doesn't flicker like interlaced images can.

**projection**—Some large-screen HDTVs offer low-priced alternatives to LCD or plasma by using projection technologies. These technologies vary, but all projection TVs throw light on a screen from the front or rear. This means they are a little to a lot bulkier than plasmas or LCDs, but some rear-projection sets have stellar picture quality.




**viewing angle**—No matter where you sit in front of an HDTV with a wide viewing angle, such as 170 degrees, its picture should look reasonably good. Test this before you buy.

**widescreen**—A TV or monitor that's wider horizontally in relation to its vertical height—typically with a 16:9 aspect ratio for HDTVs—than an older 4:3 display.






## Which Type Of HDTV Is Right For You?

**P**lasma, LCD, and projection: These are the three main types of HDTVs from which you'll choose if you're in the market for a sleek, new set. Refer to our comparison chart below to see how the technologies stack up against each other.

What It Is	What It Means	Plasma	LCD	Microdisplay Rear Projection
<b>Technology</b>	Different types of HDTVs use different technologies; understanding each type can help make your decision easier	Plasma uses a network of cells, each filled with a gas mixture. When the gas is excited, it lights up, and the cells form the image on your HDTV.	Light is streamed through cells filled with a liquid-crystal mixture. When charged, the intensity changes, forming the image on your HDTV.	There are three main types of rear-projection microdisplay: DLP, LCD, and LCoS. All use a lamp to bounce light off a chip onto the screen.
<b>Size</b>	The screen's diagonal size	Up to around 63 inches	Up to around 52 inches	Up to 65 inches and beyond
<b>Depth</b>	The depth of the set as a whole	4 to 5 inches deep	4 to 5 inches deep	From around 16 to 22 inches deep
<b>Wall mountable</b>	Can be mounted with a special bracket	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Color reproduction</b>	The brightness, saturation, and black level of an HDTV are some of the most important considerations	Excellent brightness, color saturation, and black levels	Exceptional brightness; very good color saturation; black-level quality is improving	Exceptional brightness and color saturation; generally excellent black levels
<b>Ideal room type</b>	Some types of HDTVs fit better in certain rooms than others	Media rooms with various seating areas	Rooms with windows or other ambient light	Larger rooms with a little extra floor space
<b>Cost</b>	HDTV prices range quite a bit depending on the technology	Expensive, though much less so than two years ago	Expensive, but generally less than plasma	Relatively inexpensive
<b>Perfect for</b>		TV fanatic who values picture quality above everything else	Gamers who also love HDTV	Big-screen lovers on a budget
<b>Cooler feature</b>		Excellent response time for high action	In general, can also be used as a PC monitor	Exceptional value for size
				

## Which LCD TV Is Right For You?

So you've decided to get an LCD TV. The next step is deciding *which* LCD TV to invest in. If you're like most people, you're probably looking at a set that's in the 40- to 46-inch range. If you do purchase one of these HDTVs, know that you should be able to sit 5 to 10.5 feet away from it to get the best picture. Refer to this chart for further help when shopping.




What It Is	What It Means	Philips Ambilight 52PFL7432D/37	HP SL4778N MediaSmart	Samsung LN-T4671
<b>Size</b>	The diagonal measurement of the TV's screen	52 inches	47 inches	46 inches
<b>Dimensions (without stand)</b>	Height x width x depth	32.9x50.8x4.4 inches	29.3x44.4x5.4 inches	27x48.1x4.25 inches
<b>Weight (without stand)</b>	How much the TV weighs	89.5 pounds	66 pounds	61.1 pounds
<b>Native resolution</b>	The image's sharpness is best when displayed at the native resolution; anything else must be converted	1080p	1080p	1080p
<b>Viewing angle</b>	The maximum angle at which the viewer can see the screen clearly	176 degrees	176 degrees	178 degrees
<b>Inputs</b>	Inputs let you connect your components to your TV	3 HDMI; 2 component; 2 S-Video; 2 composite; 1 USB	3 HDMI; 2 component; 2 S-Video; 2 composite; 1 PC	3 HDMI; 2 component; 2 S-Video; 1 PC; 1 RF
<b>Outputs</b>	Outputs let information from the TV, usually audio, be transferred to peripherals, such as speakers	1 audio	4 audio	2 audio
<b>Cooler feature</b>		<b>Front USB port</b> makes transferring and viewing multimedia content a snap	<b>Networkable TV</b> supports 802.11a/b/g/n and 10/100-Base T Ethernet	<b>Super Clear Panel technology</b> that reduces glare without compromising clarity
<b>MSRP</b>		\$3,199.99	\$2,499.99	\$3,499.99
		 8483786	 8419641	 8454825


	Samsung LN-T5271	Sharp AQUOS LC-46D64	Mitsubishi Diamond LT-46244	Magnavox 32MD357B	Sony BRAVIA KDL-46XBR4
	52 inches	46 inches	46 inches	32 inches	46 inches
	30.7x53.9x4.7 inches	27.9x42.9x3.75 inches	26.9x42.3x5.7 inches	21.4x31.1x6.1 inches	29x49.7x4.8 inches
	70.1 pounds	54 pounds	42.3 pounds	31.5 pounds	66.1 pounds
	1080p	1080p	1080p	720p	1080p
	178 degrees	176 degrees	N/A	176 degrees	178 degrees
	3 HDMI; 2 component; 2 S-Video; 2 composite; 1 PC	3 HDMI; 2 component; 1 S-Video; 1 PC	4 HDMI; 2 component; 2 S-Video; 2 composite	2 HDMI; 2 component; 2 S-Video; 2 composite; 1 PC	3 HDMI; 2 component; 1 S-Video; 3 composite; 1 PC
	1 audio	4 audio	2 audio	1 audio	2 audio
	<b>USB 2.0 inputs</b> so you can watch video from your HD camcorder in widescreen glory	<b>Side terminals</b> make it easy to mount this slim, attractive TV on the wall	<b>CableCARD slot</b> lets you descramble and watch cable TV without a set-top box (where available)	<b>Built-in DVD player</b> is an added bonus with this inexpensive LCD TV	<b>Motionflow</b> smooths images, particularly in sporting events and movies
	\$4,399.99	\$2,499.99	\$3,899.98	\$799.99	\$3,599.99
					
	8454843	8500936	8500721	8507289	8460284



## Which Plasma TV Is Right For You?




If you're planning on buying a plasma HDTV, it might be hard to decide on one just by looking at a wall of gorgeous sets. The most popular size of plasma TV is between 42 and 50 inches (and that's what we focus on below); as with most things in life, though, the bigger the better, so you'll find larger plasmas, as well. Refer to this chart for further help when shopping.

What It Is	What It Means	Insignia NS-PDP50	Panasonic TH-42PZ77U	Hitachi P50X901
<b>Size</b>	The diagonal measurement of the TV's screen	50 inches	42 inches	50 inches
<b>Dimensions (without stand)</b>	Height x width x depth	32x51.4x4.4 inches	25.3x47.7x4.4 inches	32.4x49.25x5 inches
<b>Weight (without stand)</b>	How much the TV weighs	95 pounds	77.2 pounds	112 pounds
<b>Native resolution</b>	The image's sharpness is best when displayed at the native resolution; anything else must be converted	720p	1080p	1080p
<b>Viewing angle</b>	The maximum angle at which the viewer can see the screen clearly	N/A	170 degrees	170 degrees
<b>Inputs</b>	Inputs let you connect your components to your TV	2 HDMI; 2 component; 1 S-Video; 1 RF; 1 PC	2 HDMI; 2 component; 3 S-Video	3 HDMI; 2 component; 1 S-Video; 1 RF
<b>Outputs</b>	Outputs let information from the TV, usually audio, be transferred to peripherals, such as speakers	1 audio	2 audio; 1 video	2 audio
<b>Cooler feature</b>		<b>The price</b> —excellent for a 50-inch plasma HDTV	<b>EZ Sync remote</b> lets you control all of your home-theater components	<b>Power Swivel Stand</b> lets you swivel the TV 30 degrees to the left or right for the best picture possible
<b>MSRP</b>		\$1,299.99	\$1,799.95	\$4,299.95
		 8454996	 8501757	 8463254

	LG 60PY3D	LG 42PC5D	Pioneer KURO PDP-6010FD	Pioneer PRO-950HD	Samsung FP-T5884
	60 inches	42 inches	60 inches	42 inches	58 inches
	38.2x63.6x4.7 inches	30x41.2x3.4 inches	38.3x58x4.9 inches	26.75x40.9x4.5 inches	33x57.7x3.9 inches
	142.4 pounds	54.2 pounds	130 pounds	84.9 pounds	120.8 pounds
	1080p	720p	1080p	1,024x768 pixels	1080p
	160 degrees	160 degrees	175 degrees	170 degrees	175 degrees
	3 HDMI; 2 component; 2 S-Video; 2 PC; 1 RF	2 HDMI; 2 component; 2 S-Video; 1 PC	4 HDMI; 2 component; 1 S-Video; 1 PC	4 HDMI; 2 component; 1 S-Video; 1 PC	3 HDMI; 2 RF; 2 S-Video; 2 component
	2 audio	1 audio	2 audio	2 audio; 1 video	2 audio
	<b>XD Engine</b> delivers well-contrasted images and bright, vibrant colors	<b>XD Engine</b> for bright, accurate colors, and it's affordably priced for a plasma TV	<b>Dual Bottom-Mounted, Detachable 17W Speakers</b> with digital amplifier	<b>CableCARD slot</b> and 10/100-Base T Ethernet LAN Home Gallery to add the TV to your home network	<b>Built-in 2-way, 20W bottom speakers</b> with virtual surround sound
	\$5,399.95	\$1,299.99	\$6,500	\$3,200	\$4,199.99
					
	8378677	8254417	8483456	8397629	8509081

## Which Microdisplay TV Is Best For You?

If you're in the market for a big HDTV, a rear-projection microdisplay model can give you a lot of bang for your buck. Here is a chart that compares eight models, all available at Best Buy ([www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)).

What It Is	What It Means	Mitsubishi Diamond WD-65733	Mitsubishi Diamond WD-73833	Panasonic PT-50LCZ70
<b>Projection technology</b>	Depending on the manufacturer, the TV will have DLP, LCD, or LCoS microdisplay technology	DLP	DLP	LCD
<b>Size</b>	The diagonal measurement of the TV's screen	65 inches	73 inches	50 inches
<b>Dimensions (without stand)</b>	Height x width x depth	39.5x58.2x15.7 inches	43.7x65.2x17.5 inches	32.9x46.9x16.25 inches
<b>Weight (without stand)</b>	How much the TV weighs	78 pounds	92.4 pounds	61.7 pounds
<b>Native resolution</b>	The image's sharpness is best when displayed at the native resolution; anything else must be converted	1080p	1080p	1080p
<b>Inputs</b>	Inputs let you connect your components to your TV	3 HDMI; 3 component; 2 S-Video; 2 RF	4 HDMI; 3 component; 2 S-Video; 2 composite	3 HDMI; 2 component; 1 S-Video; 1 PC
<b>Outputs</b>	Outputs let information from the TV, usually audio, be transferred to peripherals, such as speakers	2 audio; 1 video	3 audio	2 audio
<b>Cooliest feature</b>		<b>HD-capable antenna</b> to receive OTA HD broadcasts	Its <b>6-Color Light Engine</b> produces bright colors and true whites	<b>SD Card Slot</b> for quick and easy loading and viewing of your JPEG photos on a roomy, 50-inch screen
<b>MSRP</b>		\$2,199.99	\$4,299.98	\$1,699.95
		 8320168	 8454745	 8396069



	Samsung HL-T5676S	Sony BRAVIA KDS-55A3000	Sony BRAVIA KDS 60A3000	Sony BRAVIA KDF-46E3000	Panasonic PT-61LCX70
	DLP	LCoS (Sony's name for it is SXRD)	LCoS (Sony's name for it is SXRD)	LCD	LCD
	56 inches	55 inches	60 inches	46 inches	61 inches
	33.25x50.75x10.5 inches	36.25x49.75x15.75 inches	38.75x55.5x20 inches	31.3x43.27x11.85 inches	39.3x56.25x21.3 inches
	65.3 pounds	81.6 pounds	94.8 pounds	55.1 pounds	74.9 pounds
	1080p	1080p	1080p	1080p	720p
	3 HDMI; 2 component; 2 S-Video; 2 RF; 1 PC; 2 composite	3 HDMI; 2 component; 1 S-Video; 3 composite; 1 PC	2 HDMI; 2 component; 1 S-Video; 3 composite; 1 PC	2 HDMI; 3 component; 1 S-Video; 3 composite; 2 RF	3 HDMI; 2 component; 3 composite; 1 S-Video; 2 A/V; 1 RF
	2 A/V; 1 video	1 audio	2 audio	1 audio	2 audio
	<b>SRS TruSurround XT technology</b> for an excellent audio experience	<b>BRAVIA Theater Sync 2</b> lets you control your TV and other A/V components with one easy remote	<b>Advanced Iris Function</b> increases the contrast in dark scenes, making them easy to see	<b>Sleep timer, parental lock, and picture freeze</b> give viewers a great deal of control	<b>LiFi Technology</b> provides a light source that speeds start-up times for instant response
	\$2,099.99	\$2,499.99	\$2,699.99	\$1,599.99	\$1,995.95
					
	8293839	8451677	8451668	8414094	8396023

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# Your Own Digital Darkroom

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**I**t wasn't so many years ago that we needed to outsource all of our digital photography needs, but this is not the case anymore. Today, with a simple trip to Best Buy, we can find everything we need to build our own virtual photography studio and printing lab right at home. We'll guide you through everything you need to create a "digital darkroom" in your own home.

### The Photographer's Toolkit

The first piece of hardware you'll need is a reliable digital camera. Cameras

have come so far in just a few years that you can find a quality camera in almost every price range. First, you'll need to decide whether to buy a compact consumer-level digital camera or go all-out and buy a D-SLR (digital single-lens reflex). This is one of the most important decisions you'll make. The price difference between the two camera types can be considerable. Also, the camera you buy will influence where you can use your camera. For example, if you buy a D-SLR, you can buy telephoto lenses that let you take detailed close-ups of wildlife from a distance. You wouldn't be able to get the same type of shots with the average point-and-shoot camera. On the other hand, if you buy the D-SLR, you might miss some great photo opportunities of your children because your camera is too large to carry with you throughout the day. The type of camera you buy will also determine what accessories are suited for your camera. For more information, see "Compact Cameras" on page 38 and "Make The Jump To A Digital SLR Camera" on page 40.

In addition to carrying the right camera, you should also have extra batteries (or, if applicable, an extra battery pack) so that your camera doesn't lose power just as you're about to capture the perfect shot. Similarly, you may want to have spare flash memory cards on hand. To ensure that you shoot the best pictures possible, consider other accessories, such as a quality tripod and a

lint-free lens-cleaning cloth. Finally, a camera bag is another essential item because it provides extra padding in case you drop your camera, and it shields the LCD, lens, and other vulnerable components from scratches or dust damage. For more detailed information on backup batteries (page 43), tripods (page 44), memory cards (page 45), and camera cases (page 46), keep reading. This section of articles is devoted to helping you build your digital darkroom.

### Your Home Photo Lab

The type of equipment you'll buy for your home photo lab depends largely on how you'll display your photos. Choosing the right printer and the proper type of paper is absolutely essential. You'll find a guide to shopping for the right printer and paper in "What To Look For In A Photo Printer" on page 47.

There are other important items for your in-home photo lab. For example, you'll probably want a card reader to transfer images from your camera to your computer. This simplifies the transfer process and helps you conserve your camera's battery power.

After you read the articles on the following pages, you should be ready to head to the store, select the right equipment, and set up your own home photography and printing studio. **FG**

BY KYLEE DICKEY

### Essential Software

**A**n important, but often overlooked, item you should have is a good photo-editing program, such as Adobe Photoshop Elements 5.0 (\$99.99; [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)). Although your camera should have an array of settings that let you take beautiful photographs, you'll still find that photo-editing software will come in handy. You can use it to experiment with different ways to crop photos, and you can correct slight color casts or other imperfections. Photo-editing programs also provide you with tools for removing blemishes from faces in portraits or for applying a soft filter or other artistic effects. You'll also find that many image-editing programs include tools for creating contact sheets to help you preview and catalog your digital photos. ●



# Compact Cameras

Take The Guesswork Out Of Buying The Right Camera

**A**n essential part of any home photography studio is the right digital camera. Although D-SLRs are more advanced cameras, they can be too much, depending on the type of photographs you plan to take and the amount of photographic experience you have. With the many cameras available today, you can find a fairly advanced camera in a highly portable size.

When setting up your studio, you'll want a flexible camera. Don't try to find a camera that does everything; instead, look for one with the features you're most likely to use. The list below is a guide to some of the most important criteria for choosing the right camera.

## The Right Camera

**Optical zoom.** Zoom refers to how many times you can enlarge or "zoom in" on a scene. Optical zoom is true zoom. Digital zoom, however, is an emulated zoom. It's what happens when you magnify an image on your computer monitor. It gets larger, but you lose some quality in the process.

If you take close-ups of flowers or capture your cat's funny expressions, you don't need much zoom; 3X or 4X is sufficient. On the other hand, if you photograph wild birds in your backyard, powerful zoom, such as 10X, is essential. When looking

Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W55 • \$199.99 • [www.sonymstyle.com](http://www.sonymstyle.com)



for a camera's zoom, focus on optical zoom. Optical zoom is one of the most important specs when shopping for a compact or point-and-shoot digital camera. Whereas D-SLRs support add-on lenses, most point-and-shoot models have no (or limited) add-on options. To zoom in enough to get the shots you want, select a camera with sufficient zoom capabilities for the photos you plan to take.

**Megapixels.** The number of megapixels is less important today because most digital cameras have higher resolutions than you really need. Megapixels relate to a camera's resolution. For example, an 8MP camera has 8 megapixels or 8 million pixels. The number of pixels that make up an image determines the image's resolution. As resolution increases, an image

captures more detail and can be enlarged to a greater size without losing significant on-screen or print quality.

A 4MP camera can produce a high-quality 8x10 print; however, you might want more megapixels if the camera has a low optical zoom factor. If you buy a camera with 5MP or 6MP, you can crop an image and still have enough image data (pixels) left to print an 8x10 print. This is sufficient for most users, but if you plan to print photos larger than 8x10 (or if you want the freedom to crop images while maintaining image quality), select a camera with more megapixels.

**Shutter speed.** Shutter speed is another important camera spec, but it's typically overlooked. To take action shots of your kids at sports practice or riding their

bikes, look for a camera with a fast shutter speed, such as 1/2,500 or 1/3,200. This lets the camera "freeze" the action so your pictures aren't blurry.

**Battery type.** Some cameras use proprietary batteries (most commonly Li-Ion battery packs), which tend to last longer between charges than AA batteries. On the other hand, buying replacement batteries is trickier. Although you can find replacement proprietary batteries at Best Buy, if you're sightseeing at a national park, you may not find a spare battery. Standard AA batteries generally require replacement more often than proprietary batteries, but it's easier to find AA replacements in a pinch.

**Priority and manual modes.** When you shop for a digital camera, consider your future photography needs. Some digital cameras have few manual controls, which will limit your options later. Ensure that your camera will grow with you by selecting one with auto modes, such as **shutter priority** (in which you set the shutter speed, and the camera automatically adjusts the aperture accordingly), **aperture priority** (in which you set the aperture, and the camera automatically adjusts the shutter speed), and **full manual** (in which you have full control over both settings). Learn about how your camera works by experimenting with shutter- and aperture-priority modes. Once you've mastered those, you'll appreciate the flexibility that manual mode provides.

### So Many Choices!

There are so many digital cameras available that you may feel overwhelmed when deciding which to buy. However, by keeping your needs in mind, the decision can be easier, and by making the right camera selection now, you'll be able to use your camera and enjoy your photography hobby for years to come. **PG**

## Different Cameras For Different People

**T**he camera you select depends on what type of photos you take. Below are some examples of what features are best for different people.

**Busy parent.** The frantic life of a parent requires a camera that's easy to use, small enough to carry everywhere, and rugged. Look for a camera with a metal body, such as the Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W55 (\$199.99; [www.sonystyle.com](http://www.sonystyle.com)), to protect it from the family's hectic lifestyle. Choose a camera that focuses quickly (so important moments aren't missed) and handles indoor and outdoor shots well. Optical zoom is not as much of a concern because most times the child will be nearby.

**Sports enthusiast.** The sports enthusiast needs a camera with sufficient optical zoom to get in close to the action. For example, Canon's PowerShot S5 IS (\$399.99; [www.powershot.com](http://www.powershot.com)) has an impressive 12X optical zoom and built-in IS (image stabilization).

The camera needs a fast shutter speed to stop the action on the field or court. And finally, if the sports enthusiast will take photos at indoor events, find a camera with a wide aperture range so enough light gets through to properly expose indoor photos. A slower shutter speed will blur action photos.

**Traveler.** The traveler has many of the same needs as the busy parent: a rugged, portable camera. However, optical zoom is important to the traveler because the camera must be able to zoom in for photographs of landmarks or anything else the traveler might encounter. A camera such as the Olympus Stylus FE-240 (\$229.99; [www.olympus.com](http://www.olympus.com)), a compact camera with a metal body and 5X optical zoom, is a good choice. For the traveler who doesn't mind carrying a larger camera, Canon's PowerShot S5 IS is also a good choice because it offers so much zoom power. ●

BY KYLEE DICKEY



everything you need for  
**really good photos**

# Make The Jump To A Digital SLR Camera

## What To Consider Before You Buy

If you're serious about photography and the quality of your photos, you need an SLR (single-lens reflex) camera. Compact cameras may take photos that look quite good, but SLRs are the clear winners when it comes to quality and creative flexibility.

The reason comes down mainly to size. Although SLRs are less convenient than cameras that are sleek enough to slip into your pocket, their bulk gives them advantages that compacts may never have: SLRs use bigger image sensors, which means

visually cleaner processing of image data. As well, a compact camera's miniature lens won't have the same optical quality and precision as an SLR lens many times its size.

### Features To Look For

Before buying a D-SLR, the first thing you should ask yourself is how you plan to use it. Your answer will determine the features that are most important to factor into your decision. Here are a few to start with.

Canon EOS 5D Digital SLR • \$2,899 • [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com) • 24-105mm Macro 0.45m/1.5ft lens • \$1,249



**Lens and its focal length.** This is your No. 1 decision. If, for example, landscapes are your passion, you'll need a good wide-angle lens. If you're planning to snap your kids singing and dancing onstage or excelling on the sports field, you'll need a lens with strong telephoto performance—say, 200mm or better.

**Image stabilization.** Whether in the camera or the lens, this will help you take clear handheld shots in lower light, with longer exposures, or at greater telephoto ranges than you would otherwise be able to shoot.

**Burst mode.** If you're into action photos, the quicker the camera shoots, the better your odds for a keeper. And Nikon's new D300 (\$1,799, body only; [www.nikonusa.com](http://www.nikonusa.com)) will deliver, shooting an impressive 6 frames per second.

**Ergonomics and performance.** Buying a camera without a hands-on evaluation is a gamble. If it doesn't feel comfortable, using it may never become second nature. Also, how responsive is the autofocus? How quickly can you focus manually? How easy is it to change the settings you may need to adjust while shooting, such as white balance? Are these readily accessible via buttons, or do you have to dig through a menu to find them?

### A Camera That Grows With You

If you're migrating from a point-and-shoot camera, you may start out on your new D-SLR's auto mode, but after you're comfortable handling it, you'll eventually move into its deeper controls. So, check out features such as the flexibility of its focus options, metering choices, bracketing, and so on.



Think of your camera as the centerpiece of a system that can expand with your expertise and interests, starting with additional lenses. (See "Must-Have Accessories For Digital SLR Cameras" on page 42 for more information on lenses.) Look into how extensive a line of lenses your potential camera's manufacturer offers or see what's available from third-party makers, such as Tamron ([www.tamron.com](http://www.tamron.com)). But remember: Compatibility means more

than the lens fitting the camera body. The lens and body also need to communicate electronically so your settings and readout are accurate.

And if you like the idea of hands-off operation—say, whenever you're posing in the photo, too—go for a model that's compatible with an optional infrared remote control.

### Step Right Up

If compact and point-and-shoot cameras leave you wanting more, it's time to graduate to a D-SLR. In addition to better photo quality, it will keep you learning and your creativity growing for years to come. **FC**

BY BRIAN HODGE

## Focus On The Lens

Many D-SLR buyers never look past the basic bundle that may be available for their model: the camera body and a starter lens (often known as a kit lens). A kit lens is usually a general-purpose zoom lens that covers a range of focal lengths from wide-angle to telephoto.

However, a kit lens is often an inexpensive, entry-level piece, included with the camera body for a nominal increase in the price—sometimes as little as \$100. It will certainly produce an image, but the quality won't measure up to what a more expensive lens could give you. With pricier lenses, the glass has sharper optical precision; they're also better built, using more metal and less plastic than inexpensive, entry-level lenses.

Therefore, you may want to consider buying the camera body,

forgoing the kit lens, and selecting a better lens a la carte that covers roughly the same focal length range or more. For instance, after asking yourself how you plan to use the camera, you may decide it makes more sense to invest upfront in a lens with a greater telephoto range.

Then again, some manufacturers have begun to see the wisdom of offering body-lens combos that include higher-quality lenses. For example, Canon has paired its EOS 5D (\$2,899 body only, \$3,799 bundle; [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)) with the EF 24-105 f/4 L IS, an excellent and versatile lens. When bought separately, this lens lists for \$1,249. But when buying it with Canon's body-lens combo, you can get the same lens for considerably less. ●



# Must-Have Accessories For Digital SLR Cameras

More Add-Ons For Well-Equipped Photographers

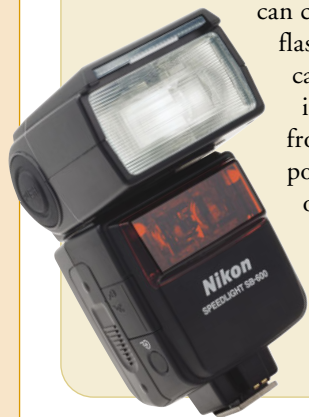
**A** digital SLR camera can take your photography to a whole new level, especially when you add a few well-chosen accessories. We've looked at cases ("Making A Case For Protection" on page 46), memory cards ("Memory Cards" on page 45), and tripods ("Support, Sturdiness & Security" on page 44), so let's explore a few more possibilities. **FG**

BY BRIAN HODGE

**Additional lenses.** With most digital-SLR kits, the included zoom lens is a basic starter lens. It will cover a relatively small but useful range of wide-angle, standard, and telephoto shots, but it leaves a lot of room to grow. You may decide you could use a higher-quality lens that covers the same range of focal lengths, a wide-angle lens that covers an even broader expanse, or a more powerful telephoto. With a macro lens, such as the Olympus Zuiko Digital 35mm f/3.5 Macro Lens (\$289.99; [www.olympusamerica.com](http://www.olympusamerica.com)) you can shoot within a few inches of small subjects: flowers, insects, and so on. The more lenses you have, the better prepared you are to handle different shooting situations.



**Flash attachment.** Even though your D-SLR has a built-in flash, a separate flash, such as Nikon's SB-600 AF Speedlight (\$239.99; [www.nikonusa.com](http://www.nikonusa.com)), will provide you with much more power and flexibility. In addition to a greater effective range and faster recharging, most attachable flash units will let you swivel them in order to direct the light somewhere other than head-on at your subject. Some cameras are even equipped with a jack so you



can connect the flash by a long cable and set it up away from your own position—to one side of your subject, for example.



**Lens filters.** A lens filter screws onto the front of the lens barrel. There are many types of filters, so you can render a variety of effects to your shots. One of the most useful is a polarizer filter, such as Sunpak's DF-7062-CP 72mm Circular Polarizer (\$75.95; [www.tocad.com](http://www.tocad.com)), which will increase color saturation and reduce or eliminate glare from reflective surfaces, including glass and water. Also handy are neutral density filters, which reduce light so you can use longer exposures and/or wide aperture settings under bright conditions.

**Lens cleaning kit.** Because your lens is exposed to the elements, it will pick up dust, water drops, and other debris. These can show up as dark spots or blurs on your photos, so keeping the lens clean is imperative. Look for a kit with cleaning fluid, a microfiber cloth, and a bulb brush, which will blow and whisk away the gunk. You'll find all three in the Dynex DX-DA101401 Lens Cleaning Kit (\$5.99; [www.dynexproducts.com](http://www.dynexproducts.com)).



# Backup Batteries

## Don't Miss The Moment

**W**hether you're a serious photographer, a camera-happy parent, or just an amateur shutterbug, one thing remains true: The picture is all about the moment. Nothing can ruin that moment like raising your digital camera to your eye, hearing the dreaded "bzzzt," and watching your camera shut down as the battery runs out.

The best and simplest way to avoid this is to always carry backup batteries. No matter what type of battery you need, it could fizzle out at the wrong time. How often have you forgotten to turn off your camera or the LCD viewer that virtually drinks battery life or found your little nephew playing with the power-guzzling zoom?

### Tips For Keeping The Backup Battery Charged

A backup battery is useful only if it is fresh; for optimum performance from your backup, be sure to:

- keep it out of the heat (which can drain the battery faster)
- keep it out of the cold (condensation can form and cause corrosion)
- remember that even a charged NiMH battery will lose its power over time, so it's a good idea to recharge it if it has been sitting around for a while

### Types Of Batteries

Essentially, there are two types of digital camera batteries: AA and proprietary. AA batteries come in three varieties: alkaline, lithium (Energizer e2 AA Lithium Battery [(8-pack], \$19.99; [www.energizer.com](http://www.energizer.com)), and rechargeable NiMH (Kodak Rechargeable NiMH Battery, \$17.99; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)). Proprietary Li-Ion batteries (Canon Lithium-Ion Battery, \$59.99; [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)) are also rechargeable. Some cameras require a proprietary Li-Ion battery, but for most cameras, you can buy them at your local Best Buy. Your camera's users manual says which kind you need.

### Pros & Cons

Alkaline batteries are inexpensive and readily available, even in foreign countries. However, they do not last long; you can always lug around a number of backups and know they will be fresh, but you will have to replace them frequently, which is inconvenient and environmentally unfriendly.

Lithium AA batteries have essentially the same pros and cons as alkaline batteries, except that they last significantly longer, both on the shelf and in your camera. They usually cost more than twice as much, but because they last more than twice as long, they are generally a better bargain. Lithium AAs last longer in cold weather, too.

Rechargeable and long-lasting, NiMH batteries are a better alternative to alkaline. They do cost significantly more, but because they are good for repeated use, they are more economical than alkaline in the end. One drawback is that if you drain your batteries and are not near an outlet to plug in the charger, you are out of luck. Still, if you have a backup and make sure they're always charged, chances are you will run out of pictures to take before you run out of juice. Be



aware that these batteries will slowly lose their charge even when not in use, so before you head out for a photo expedition, be sure both sets of batteries are freshly charged.

Proprietary Li-Ion batteries are generally high quality and last longer than NiMHs. However, they share the same problem of needing to recharge, which can be tricky if you are overseas or far away from an outlet. Again, however, if you buy a backup Li-Ion pack, you should be able to take more than enough pictures before your batteries leave you high and dry. When not in use, Li-Ion batteries, like NiMH batteries, will gradually lose their charge, but these will do so at a greatly reduced rate, so they stay fresher longer. **FG**

BY SETH COLANER

# Support, Sturdiness & Security

## The Benefits Of Using A Tripod

**F**or many professional photographers, a tripod is the most important equipment they own other than their cameras, particularly when they're shooting in low-lighting environments that require longer shutter times. Whether you use a pro-level digital SLR or a basic compact digicam, however, a tripod can prove useful in numerous situations.

Although compact digicam owners won't require a tripod nearly as often as a D-SLR user, using a tripod can go a long way toward snapping better-focused shots at night or when taking shots with a larger depth of field. A tripod will also provide a stable foundation on which to take macro shots, to use the camera's self-timer function so you can get yourself into shots, and to step away from the camera to re-compose shots.

For D-SLR users, a tripod's primary function is combating the heavier weight and greater size of these cameras' bodies and lenses, which makes them especially sensitive to shocks and vibrations that lead to blurriness. This is especially true when attaching a long, telephoto lens. A tripod will not only stabilize the camera to help avoid photographic flaws—some experts recommend using a cable release or remote to avoid touching the camera at all—but it will also alleviate the fatigue your arms will otherwise feel holding a D-SLR for extended periods.

### Tripods Big & Small

You'll find monopods and tripods at BestBuy.com, many that are compatible with digicams and camcorders and bundle with shoulder straps and bags. For compact digicams, we like Sunpak's 14.4-ounce, 60-inch Platinum Plus Monopod (\$29.99; [www.sunpak.jp/english](http://www.sunpak.jp/english)) with included neck strap, neoprene handgrip, and locking rings. For D-SLRs, the Manfrotto-Bogen scratch-resistant Tripod Kit (\$279.99; [www.manfrotto.com](http://www.manfrotto.com)) provides good front and lateral tilting; four-angled, anodized aluminum legs; a bag and shoulder strap; and a



Joby Gorillapod SLR  
\$44.95 • [www.joby.com](http://www.joby.com)

quick-release plate. For general use, we like the flexible-leg design of Joby's Gorillapod SLR (\$44.95; [www.joby.com](http://www.joby.com)), which wraps around a pole, tree branch, or other support. **PG**

BY BLAINE FLAMIG

### Tripod Traits

- A tripod should reach chin level without the center support extended and offer support that exceeds the combined weight of the camera and any attachable lens
- Tripods use tilting/panning (up and down, side to side, and horizontal) or ball-style heads that attach to a camera; ball heads are typically better than tilting/panning heads.
- A head that includes a quick-release plate lets you quickly detach the camera from the tripod
- Wood is considered the best material for absorbing shocks, but carbon fiber, magnesium, and aluminum tripods are lighter
- Rubberized tripod feet will help prevent slippage
- Adjustable legs will help balance the tripod on uneven surfaces
- Tripods use levers or screws to lock the legs when expanded; screw varieties are considered more stable and secure than lever varieties



# Memory Cards

## A Must-Have For A Better Photographic Experience



SanDisk Ultra II 2GB SD • \$44.99 • [www.sandisk.com](http://www.sandisk.com)

**T**here's really no way around it: If you want to use your new digital camera efficiently, you need to purchase a memory card. Although some digicams include internal memory and/or bundle a memory card, the space both options offer is typically too small to store many photos of decent quality. To make room for new images, you'll soon be forced to delete older photos or routinely transfer photos from the camera to a PC. Before buying a new card, however, consider the following advice.

The majority of digicams accept only one type of memory, such as SD (Secure Digital), Memory Stick, or CF (Compact-Flash). Further, many camera makers use

proprietary memory, such as FujiFilm's ([www.fujifilm.usa.com](http://www.fujifilm.usa.com)) use of xD-Picture Card memory. Thus, it's imperative to know what memory type your camera accepts before buying a card. The camera manufacturer's Web site and users manual will contain this information. Additionally, BestBuy.com's Digital Camera section includes a helpful Memory Finder that pinpoints which memory works with specific camera models; it also provides pricing and storage-capacity information.

Once you've determined which type of memory card your camera takes, it might be tempting to buy a new or used card at a cut-rate price from a lesser-known card maker or from people you don't know on third-party sites, such as eBay.com. Fight the temptation. You may save a few bucks, but sources such as those have deservedly earned a reputation for periodically providing cards with faulty, unreliable performance, which can lead to losing invaluable photos or videos. Memory cards are one accessory category where it pays to stick to trusted, well-known makers, several of which include SanDisk ([www.sandisk.com](http://www.sandisk.com)), PNY Electronics ([www.pny.com](http://www.pny.com)), Lexar ([www.lexar.com](http://www.lexar.com)), Sony

([www.memorystick.com](http://www.memorystick.com)), and Kingston ([www.kingston.com](http://www.kingston.com)).

Evaluating your photographic habits is also beneficial when buying a memory card. For example, if you own a 7MP D-SLR and plan to regularly capture large video files or snap high-resolution shots as RAW or TIFF files, those files will require considerably more space than standard JPEG images. Thus, consider buying a card with a high capacity, such as SanDisk's 4GB Ultra Secure Digital High Capacity card (\$84.99). If you plan to shoot mostly casual photos stored as smaller JPEG files with a compact digicam vs. large, high-resolution photos stored as RAW or TIFF files with a D-SLR, you won't greatly benefit from a more expensive, high-speed memory card that reads and writes large files at a quicker pace than standard cards. **PG**

BY BLAINE FLAMIG

### Is Bigger Really Better?

**U**nless you live a blessed life, disaster finds us all eventually, digital photographers included. That's why many photographers keep several smaller-capacity memory cards on hand rather than only one large-capacity card. The idea is that if you lose a card or one falters, you'll lose fewer photos than if you're using only one large-capacity card to store everything. Using one card does provide some organizational and usage advantages, particularly when shooting in a continuous or burst mode or shooting long, continuous videos, but using multiple cards will ward off the heartbreak you'll feel losing hundreds of shots at once if that one card tanks. ●



# Making A Case For Protection

Safeguard Your Digicam With A Suitable Enclosure



Lowepro Ridge 10 • \$14.99 • [www.lowepro.com](http://www.lowepro.com)

**A**lthough there are dozens of styles, colors, sizes, and materials to choose from when shopping for a case for your digital camera at Best-Buy.com, every case ultimately serves one primary function: protecting your camera from the various elements you subject it to. Whether this means safeguarding your digicam from the effects of extreme changes in temperature, water, dust, debris, and bumps (or protecting your case from the critical eyes of the fashion police), there's a case that's up to the task.

Before you start shopping, however, qualifying the type of photographer you are and your specific needs will help narrow your case choices to a

workable number. For example, if you're primarily a casual shooter who uses a compact digicam to snap casual shots of friends and family, a basic, soft-covered, form-fitting case, such as Lowepro's water-resistant Ridge 10 (\$14.99; [www.lowepro.com](http://www.lowepro.com); available in five colors) with removable shoulder strap and belt loop, will ably do the job. Conversely, if you'll be lugging around a large, high-end D-SLR model to snap studio-worthy prints of sporting events, landscapes, or weddings, you'll need a roomy bag, such as Canon's Digital Gadget Bag 200DG for Canon EOS models (\$100; [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)), to store not only your camera but also multiple lenses, memory cards, flash units, cables, extra batteries, and more.

If you're a hiker, rafter, biker, or just an outdoor type, consider a backpack-style case, such as Lowepro's SlingShot 100AW (\$79.99), a water-resistant, nylon model that includes a micro-fiber cloth for your camera's LCD. If museums and art galleries are more your speed, the fashion-conscious Olympus Premium Slim Leather Case (\$29.99; [www.olympusamerica.com](http://www.olympusamerica.com); red, brown, and black) or Kodak Fashion Camera Wallet (\$34.99; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com); brown, black, burgundy, and green) will blend right in.

No matter your needs or lifestyle, you'll find soft, semi-hard, and hard cases constructed of polyester, leather, vinyl, nylon, aluminum, protective foam lining, and other materials that include Velcro- and zipper-enabled dividers, pouches, and pockets, as well as hooks, latches, handles, rollers, and straps. Further, in addition to the generic, all-purpose cases available, you'll find many cases designed for a specific camera series from manufacturers such as Sony, Casio, Hewlett-Packard, Kodak, Casio, and JVC. **FG**

BY BLAINE FLAMIG

## Underwater Protection

**I**f your photographic adventures take you off dry land into wetter environments, you'll need to step up the protection you provide your camera. Two things to know about camera cases geared toward skiing, snorkeling, scuba diving, and related activities are cases are pricey compared to standard cases, and they're usually constructed for specific camera models. ●

everything you need for  
**really good photos**

# What To Look For In A Photo Printer

Choose Wisely

**T**hese days, there is a printer for every purpose. Whatever your lifestyle, you'll be able to find a printer that can handle your projects. Do you want large, frame-worthy prints or just snapshots for a photo album? Do you want a printer that prints photos only, or do you want a multimedia digital-imaging workstation? Are you on a budget or are you craving a top-of-the-line machine?

Which type of printer owner are you? Use our guide to help you decide which printer best serves your needs.



## The Traveler

Don't be tied down by your office printer; with a portable printer, you can snap photos anywhere and print them—on vacation, on a road trip, or while visiting family and friends for the holidays—in roughly the amount of time it takes a Polaroid to develop. Just plug your media card (or USB flash drive on which you have previously stored photos) into the printer, prepare your photos using the



HP Photosmart A526 • \$99.99 • [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)



printer's LCD, and print. There are even some options that let you print wirelessly from your camera, such as Bluetooth add-ons, IR signal transfers, and even Wi-Fi-enabled digital cameras, but that is a topic for another day.

There is a nice selection of portable printers that let you print up to 4x6 photos without the need for a computer: The Canon PIXMA mini 260 (\$149.99; [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)) and the HP Photosmart A526 (\$99.99; [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)), for example, are compact, lightweight (4.8 and 2.59, respectively), and easily transportable. You'll be pleasantly surprised by the good print quality on such tiny printers.

Portable printers are powered via either AC adapter or optional battery power (which you must usually buy separately). With battery power, not only can you take your printer with you on a vacation, but you also can take it with you to the beach—just be careful not to get any sand in it.

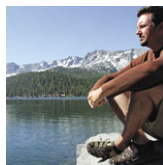


### The Artist

For some photographers, digital imaging goes well beyond printing their own pictures. If you enjoy making your own holiday and greeting cards, photo stickers for the kids, and large prints of snowy scenes, you need a photo printer that not only has superior image quality but also can handle a variety of media.

Look for a printer that can print images on more surfaces than just photo paper and also be aware of what sizes of paper the printer can handle. The Canon PIXMA Pro9500 (\$849.99) prints images without borders up to 13x19, has a stellar 4,800 x 2,400dpi, and can handle many types of papers that other printers cannot, such as watercolor and pastel paper. With so

many paper options, it'll be easy to let your creativity flow.



### The Serious Photographer

If you're serious about your pictures, you're going to want to have an equally serious photo printer for optimum print quality. Look for a printer with the highest possible dpi (5,760 x 1,440, for example) and at least six archival colors; this will get you high-quality prints that, if stored and treated with care, shouldn't fade for about a hundred years. The HP Photosmart Pro B9180 (\$699.99) has all these options and more.

Additionally, a printer that lets you print on different finishes, such as glossy or matte, and on different media is a necessity. With the Epson Stylus R800 (\$399; [www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com)), you can even print a photo directly onto CDs and DVDs, which would be an excellent way to package a digital portfolio of your photography. The Stylus R800 can also handle your panorama shots, printing up to 8.3x44.



### The Bargain Hunter

You may not be able to drop a few hundred on a photo printer after buying a new digital camera. There are inexpensive solutions to the photo printing needs of the budget-conscious.

Generally, there are tradeoffs in print quality when the price goes down, but with printers such as the Epson R380 (\$110), you won't lose much. It has an amazing dpi for the price (up to 5,760 x 1,440), handles a nice variety of media, and can operate PC-free.

Whichever photo printer you decide to buy, be sure the printer will meet your needs as your talents and abilities grow—check the resolution (at least 1,200 x 1,200dpi), print size, number of ink cartridges (six or eight is much better than one or two), types of paper it handles, and any other features you desire before you buy. Treat yourself to a printer that suits your unique lifestyle. **PG**

BY SETH COLANER

## Photo Finish

**T**here is a wide selection of photo paper available these days that lets you add an extra flair to your prints. Here are a few examples of interesting and fun paper types.

**Kodak Ultra Premium Studio Gloss Photo Paper** (20 sheets for \$6.99; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)). This beautiful 4x6 paper is for your traditional-sized prints.

**Canon Photo Paper Plus Semi-Gloss** (20 sheets for \$12.99; [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)). Great for 8x10 headshots and other larger prints.

**Hewlett-Packard Advanced Glossy Photo Paper** (25 sheets for \$49.99; [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)). This 13x19 paper is perfect for large-format prints.

**Canon Digital Art Paper Variety Pack** (20 sheets for \$49.99). The variety pack includes five sheets each of museum etching, photo rag, premium matte, and semi-gloss paper for unique and beautiful finishes for all sorts of photo projects. ●

# Digital Cameras

## 5 Must-Have Accessories

Digital cameras capture the memories of events large and small in our lives, and the list of possible accessories is nearly endless. Here are five, though, that we find indispensable. **FG**

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

### 1 Memory Cards

A memory card full of pictures is a wonderful thing, unless it's too full to accept additional pictures—especially pictures of your son and his kindergarten friends in their Halloween costumes. Different digital cameras have different memory card slots, so make sure you know what kind of card your camera takes. If you don't know, visit the Memory Cards & Sticks page on Best Buy's Web site and click the Memory Card Finder link. From there, you'll be prompted to select from drop-down lists your Device, the Manufacturer, and the Model, and a page of specs will pop up telling you not only what kind of media your camera takes, but also detailing the manufacturers and cards (and capacities) available for your camera.



### 2 Camera Case

You'll find bags and cases in all sizes and with all levels of protection. If you've finally splurged and upgraded to the D-SLR you've had your eye on, you'll want a roomy case with plenty of padding so it protects your extra lenses. Make sure the bag has pockets that close with clasps, too, so you can tuck in a spare memory card or two. Plan ahead for your winter ski trip with a padded, nylon backpack, such as the Lowepro DryZone Rover (\$269.99; [www.lowepro.com](http://www.lowepro.com)), so you safely carry your camera without compromising your balance. And if your winter break instead includes a snorkeling trip to the warm waters of the Caribbean, you'll need waterproof housing for the camera. Know that waterproof cases are typically designed for specific cameras; one size does not fit all. Check the case's specs to make sure it fits your camera before buying it.



### 3 External Storage



Memory cards are great for short-term storage, but because external storage devices are inexpensive and durable, it's a good idea to periodically offload the pictures from your memory card. If you'd rather not clutter up your PC's hard drive or you'd like a dedicated storage device solely for pictures, consider an external hard drive, such as the 160GB Iomega EGo (\$159.99; [www.iomega.com](http://www.iomega.com)). This lightweight USB 2.0 device is portable, too.

### 4 Photo Printer

The beauty of a digital camera and photo printer combo is that you end up printing only those pictures you really want to keep. You don't have to print those spooky-looking photos of your red-eyed dog or the accidental pictures of your finger. With PictBridge-compatible printers, you won't have to offload your pictures onto your computer before printing them, either, unless you'd like to edit them first.



### 5 Power Supply

Whether your camera takes AA batteries or rechargeables, make sure you have an adequate supply so you don't miss photo opportunities as a result of dead batteries. If you have rechargeable batteries, make sure your camera case (or carry-on) has room for your charger, too. When you're traveling overseas, check the power supply where you are visiting, making sure you'll have the necessary adaptors for your charger, so you don't accidentally fry it. Tuck in an extra



set of AA batteries for your point-and-shoot digital camera, although you'd be hard pressed to find a destination too remote for a store that stocks AA batteries.



# Digital Cameras

## Top 5 Things To Know



**D**igital camera prices have dropped dramatically in the last few years, but that doesn't mean buying your first—or even second—digital camera is an insignificant investment. Here are some important things to keep in mind as you shop; they'll help you make informed decisions when choosing a digicam.

### 1 Optical Zoom Range

What is the optical zoom range of the lens? Remember, pay attention to optical zoom range only; don't count the digital zoom, which does nothing more than crop the image to make it appear "closer" and may degrade image quality. A zoom goes from wide angle, which is good for landscapes, to telephoto, which is good for photographing distant subjects. Although most point-and-shoot cameras offer limited options in wide angle, there are many choices for telephoto. Choose a zoom that best fits your needs.

### 2 LCD Size

What is the size and resolution of the LCD? Although a 2-inch LCD is perfectly usable, most digital cameras are equipped with 2.5-inch or even 3-inch LCDs, which generally make it easier to compose a shot, read camera menus, and review images. On the downside, larger LCDs will drain batteries faster than smaller ones. Also, check the LCD

resolution in pixels; 115,000 is usable, but 235,000 will be sharper.

### 3 Print Sizes

How many megapixels does the camera have, or, more importantly, what is the largest size print that can be made from that camera? More megapixels doesn't necessarily mean you'll get better pictures, but a camera's megapixel count does affect how large you can print an image. If you don't plan on making large prints, then getting a camera with extra megapixels will be a waste of money and storage space (more megapixels mean larger file sizes, which will fill up your media card more quickly). To determine how many megapixels you need, figure out how large you want to print your images. The rule of thumb is to multiply the dimensions (in inches) of the print you'd like to make by either 300ppi (pixels per inch) or 200ppi. The ppi indicates the print resolution of the image, and either 300ppi or 200ppi will produce a good print. To make an 8x10 print at 200ppi, you'll need a file that measures 1,600 x 2,000 pixels or a 3.2MP camera (1,600 x 2,000 = 3,200,000). Using the same math, the ideal camera resolution for an 8x10 print at 300ppi is 7.2MP.

### 4 Battery Requirements

There are two things to keep in mind when it comes to batteries: battery type and battery life. Many digicams use proprietary, rechargeable Li-Ion batteries and

come with a charger, whereas other cameras include one-time use AA batteries. While AA batteries are ubiquitous, alkaline and other nonrechargeable batteries will need to be discarded and replaced. A more economical, environmentally-sound solution is to use NiMH rechargeable AA batteries and a charger. Your camera's battery life is generally rated according to CIPA (Camera & Imaging Products Association) standards, which will give you the average amount of photos you can shoot on one charge. CIPA ratings can be found on manufacturers' Web sites, and the higher the rating a camera has, the better.

### 5 Media Card

What type of media card does the camera use? Most digital cameras—including sub-\$1,000 digital SLRs—use SD cards, which come in different capacities and speeds. The number of images you can fit on a card depends on the camera's megapixel count and the resolution or quality level you select when shooting. Determine the maximum number of images you want to put on the card; that will help decide what capacity card you need. Also, find out if the card is SDHC (Secure Digital High Capacity)-compatible and will work with high-capacity (4GB) SD cards. Only cameras with an SDHC designation (available on most manufacturers' Web sites) are capable of using a card with more than a 2GB capacity. **FC**

BY THEANO NIKITAS

# Digital Imaging Glossary

A

re you confused about what that lingo on camera boxes means? Use this glossary to help decode the world of digital photography.

**aperture**—An iris-like diaphragm opening that can expand and contract the lens to let you control the amount of light that passes through it, thus affecting the exposure. The term “f-stop” is used interchangeably with aperture.

**burst mode**—Where the camera can take several shots (up to 10) consecutively, usually in one second.

**CCD**—Charge-coupled device, which is the camera’s image-sensing component. It converts light into energy that can be stored as digital data on your camera.

**depth of field**—The area that is in focus in front of and beyond the photo subject.

**digital zoom**—Magnifying an image digitally by cropping it and filling in the rest with interpolated pixels, thus degrading the quality. Even if the numbers are impressive, never choose a camera based on digital zoom.

**f-stop**—See aperture. Smaller f-stop numbers mean a wider lens opening; larger f-stop numbers mean a narrower lens opening.

**ISO**—For digital cameras, the ISO setting measures the sensitivity to light (similar to how it does with film). Digital camera ISO settings, such as 200, 400, etc., should capture photos as if one were using film with such a speed. Lower ISO settings mean you need more light, and vice versa.

**LCD**—The screen on the back of the camera that lets you see a live-action view of your subject, your photo after you’ve taken it, or both.

**lens**—The apparatus on the front of the camera that gathers and directs light toward the imaging device. In a digital camera, the lens probably has both an optical and digital zoom.

**megapixel**—Approximately 1 million pixels. The higher the megapixel count, the higher the resolution and the more you can crop, which means (in general) better-quality photos.

**memory card**—Because digital cameras have very little onboard memory, they need a flash memory card to store more than a dozen or so images. The type of memory card you need depends on your camera make and model. Some of the most popular memory cards are Secure Digital, MultiMediaCard, Compact Flash, and Sony Memory Sticks. In general, memory cards are quite small.

**noise**—The small statistical variations among pixels that lead to (usually) minor distortions of color in a photo.

**optical zoom**—The ability to move the lens physically closer to your subject. With optical zoom, the higher the number (such as 5X or 10X), the better. When choosing a camera, always consider the optical zoom, not the digital zoom.



**resolution**—The number of pixels in an image. The higher the resolution, the more detail and quality in a photo. Resolution is measured in a proportion (such as 2,272 x 1,704).

**shutter**—A mechanism that opens and closes to allow light to pass through the lens. You can usually control the camera’s shutter speed.




**shutter speed**—The length of time a camera’s shutter is open to let light through the lens to hit the sensor, which records the image. This is expressed in fractions of a second: For instance, a shutter speed of 1/250 means that the shutter speed is 1/250th of a second.

**viewfinder**—The small opening in the camera that the user looks through to frame a shot. Some digital cameras don’t have a viewfinder and rely on using an LCD to frame the shot.

**white balance**—Light levels are adjusted electronically to ensure whites in a certain environment are pure, leading to more lifelike colors. White balance can usually be manually adjusted, too.

## Which Camera Is Best For You?

If you're a little confused about the most important features in a digital camera, you're not alone. In this chart, we compare features from select digital cameras available at Best Buy ([www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)), and we also explain what these features mean. If that still has you cross-eyed, we recommend models for certain lifestyles.

		Compact		
What It Is	What It Means	Canon PowerShot SD870 IS	Kodak EasyShare Z812 IS	HP Photosmart R742
<b>Resolution</b>	In general, more pixels mean bigger, clearer prints	8MP	8.2MP	7MP
<b>Optical zoom</b>	Moves the lens physically closer to your subject	3.8X	12X	3X
<b>Memory card</b>	Removable card that stores your photos in your camera	SD/SDHC/MMC	SD/SDHC/MMC	SD/SDHC
<b>LCD size</b>	The LCD is the display on the back of the camera	3 inches	2.5 inches	2.5 inches
<b>Battery life</b>	Based on how many shots you can take on a single charge	170 shots	N/A	150 shots
<b>ISO</b>	Light sensitivity; the higher the ISO, the greater the ability to take photos in low-light situations	Auto; Manual: 80, 100, 200, 400, 800, 1,600	Auto; Manual: 64, 100, 200, 400, 800, 1,600, 3,200	Auto; Manual: 80, 100, 200, 400, 800, 1,600
<b>Print sizes up to (at 240ppi)</b>		10x13 inches	10x13 inches	9x12 inches
<b>Perfect for</b>		Style-conscious photographers who want a top-of-the-line compact camera	A great 'tween camera if you've outgrown your point-and-shoot but don't want a D-SLR, yet	First-time digital camera users who are looking for a good starter shooter
<b>MSRP</b>		\$399.99	\$299.99	\$149.99
				
		8469212	8473449	8419703






## D-SLR






	Olympus Stylus 790SW	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-7200	Canon Digital Rebel XTi	Nikon D40	Olympus Evolt E-510
	7.1MP	8.1MP	10.1MP	6.1MP	10MP
	3X	5X	EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-22*	18-55mm f/3.5 - f/5.6 ED II AF-S DX Zoom-Nikkor lens*	2 Zuiko Digital zoom lenses*
	xD Picture Card	Memory Stick Duo/PRO Duo	CompactFlash	SD/SDHC	CompactFlash/Micro-drive/xD-Picture Card
	2.5 inches	3.5 inches	2.5 inches	2.5 inches	2.5 inches
	325 images	250 images	300 images	470 images	650 images
	Auto; Manual: 80, 100, 200, 400, 800, 1,600	Auto; Manual: 80, 100, 200, 400, 800, 1,600, 3,200	Auto; Manual: 100, 200, 400, 800, 1,600	Auto; Manual: 200, 400, 800, 1,600	Auto; Manual: 80, 100, 200, 400, 800, 1,600
	9x12 inches	10x13 inches	10x16 inches	8x11 inches	10x16 inches
	Active users who want to take their camera biking, hiking, and skiing	Users who love on-board cropping and editing, as well as lots of handy features	Confident camera users experienced with using D-SLRs	A newbie to the D-SLR arena	D-SLR users who want a good balance of auto and manual controls
	\$299.99	\$399.99	\$899.99	\$599.99	\$999.99
					
	8460453	8440234	7989901	8139169	8359046

\*These lenses are for D-SLR cameras, and thus, there's no established equivalent to optical zoom. Talk to your Best Buy Digital Imaging specialist for more information.

## Which Digital Camcorder Is Right For You?

**D**igital camcorders come in a number of formats: DVD, hard drive, MiniDV, and high definition are the most common. By comparing the following digital camcorders available at Best Buy ([www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)), you can determine which format and product best fit your style.




What It Is	What It Means	DVD		HD/DVD
		Samsung SC-DC575	Panasonic VDR-D210	Canon HR10
LCD screen size	Diagonal length of viewing screen	2.7 inches	2.7 inches	2.7 inches
Optical zoom	The number of times the lens can enlarge or reduce the field of view; the better type of zoom	26X	32X	10X
Digital zoom	The number of times the camcorder can magnify a portion of an image; may result in loss of resolution	1,200X	1,000X	200X
Recording speeds	The type of speed and (if available) maximum amount of time that can be recorded in each	XP SP LP	XP SP LP	XP+ XP SP LP
Memory card	Type of flash memory cards compatible with the camcorder (cards not included unless noted)	SD/MMC	SD/SDHP	miniSD
Digital still resolution	The number of megapixels the camcorder can capture in still images	1MP	<1MP	2.07MP
Lines of resolution	Number of lines of horizontal resolution; the higher the number, the greater the detail	510	480	1,080
Weight	Weight of the camcorder (without battery, unless noted)	12.8 ounces	1.1 pounds	1.2 pounds
Perfect for		Learning to shoot on an inexpensive camcorder	Those new to camcorders—easy to operate	HD movie buffs
Coolest feature		Image stabilization keeps video still when your hands are shaky	Records to multiple DVD formats for easy editing on your PC	HDMI connector lets you output HD video
MSRP		\$399.99	\$349.95	\$1,199.99
				
		8264914	8212668	8408118

Hard Drive		High Definition			
		Hard Drive	Hard Drive	Hard Drive	MiniDV
	Panasonic SDR-H18	JVC GZMG 155 US	Sony Handycam HDR-SR5	JVC HD Everio GZ-HD7	Canon HV20 HD Camcorder
	2.7 inches	2.7 inches	2.7 inches	2.7 inches	2.7 inches
	32X	32X	10X	10X	10X
	1,000X	800X	80X	200X	200X
	XP SP LP	Ultra Fine Norm Eco	XP HQ SP LP	HQ-VBR LT-VBR CBR	SP LP
	SD/SDHP	SD	Memory Stick Duo and Pro	SD	miniSD
	5MP	1.07MP	4MP	2.1MP	3.1MP
	540	540	1,080 (i)	1,080	1,080
	14.4 ounces	11.2 ounces	1.2 pounds	14.4 ounces	1.1 pounds
	Beginners who don't want to mess with discs or cassettes	Those who appreciate some in-camera editing features	Those who want an easy-to-use high-definition camcorder	Anyone who loves high-def shooting	Anyone who loves to combine form and function
	High-speed USB port lets you transfer video quickly	Its size; it's small, making it easy to hold and operate	5.1-channel surround-sound for excellent audio	The ability to play back video in true high definition	HD CMOS sensor captures HD video on the 40GB hard drive in vibrant color
	\$499.95	\$599.99	\$999.99	\$1,699	\$1,099
					
	8240968	8219732	8346159	8225066	8495791



## Which Photo Printer Is Right For You?

If you print digital photos at home frequently, or would like to, then a dedicated photo printer may be a better option than an all-in-one. Photo printers at Best Buy ([www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)) offer a variety of features in a wide range of prices.

What It Is	What It Means	Epson PictureMate Snap	Epson PictureMate Dash	Lexmark X9350
<b>Photo print speed</b>	How fast it can print one image	45 seconds (4x6)	37 seconds (4x6)	22 seconds (4x6)
<b>Resolution</b>	Dots per inch (or dpi)—the more, the better	5,760 x 720	5,760 x 1,440	4,800 x 1,200
<b>Ink cartridges</b>	How many cartridges the printer uses	1	1	4
<b>Paper sizes</b>	Sizes of paper compatible with the printer	4x6	Wallet, passport, 2x2, 3x3, 4x6, and more	A, A4, 3x5, 4x6, 4x8, 4x12, 5x7, 6x9, 8x10, and more
<b>PC-free printing</b>	The ability to print images directly from camera	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Memory card</b>	Type of memory card the computer can accept and recognize	CompactFlash, SD, SDHC, miniSD, MMC, Memory Stick, and more	CompactFlash, Micro-drive, MemoryStick, SD, SDHC, MMC, xD-Picture Card	CompactFlash I & II, SD, MMC, Memory Stick/Pro, xD Picture Card, Microdrive, and others with adapters
<b>Wireless connectivity</b>	The ability to communicate with other peripherals with no wires	Yes, with optional Bluetooth adapter	Yes, with optional Bluetooth adapter	Yes
<b>Dimensions</b>	Height x width x depth	5.7x8.5x6 inches	8.7x6.5x9.1 inches	10.6x18.3x15.1 inches
<b>Perfect for</b>		On-the-go photographers	Photographers who want to print on the road	Networked home office with photo printing needs
<b>Coollest feature</b>		Can operate on a rechargeable battery (not included)	3.6 inch LCD photo viewer	Wireless printing (802.11g/b)
<b>MSRP</b>		\$149.99	\$99.99	\$279.99
				
		7955359	8452569	8339452

	Canon Selphy CP740	HP Photosmart D7260	HP Photosmart A826	HP Photosmart Pro B8350 Photo Printer	Kodak EasyShare 5300 All-In-One
	51 seconds (4x6)	36 seconds (4x6)	39 seconds (4x6)	26 seconds (4x6)	28 seconds (4x6)
	300 x 300	4,800 x 1,200	4,800 x 1,200	4,800 x 1,200	4,800 x 1,200
	1	6	1	2	2
	2.13, 3.39, 4x6, 4x8, and more	Letter, legal, 4x6, 5x7, 8x10, iron-on transfers, banners, and more	Wallet, 4x6, 4x6.5, 4x8, 5x7, and more	Legal, letter, 3x5, 4x6, 5x7, 8x10, 11x14, 13x9, and more	A, A4, 3x5, 4x6, 4x8, 4x12, 5x7, 6x9, 8x10, 11x14
	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	Compact Flash, multiple MMC formats, xD-picture card, SD, SDHC, and more	Compact Flash I & II, MMC, SD, Memory Stick/Duo, Smart-Media, xD-Picture Card	CompactFlash, Memory Stick, SD, MMC, xD-Picture Card, miniSD with optional adapter	No	CompactFlash, SD, MMC, Memory Stick, Memory Stick Pro, xD-Picture Card, Microdrive
	Yes, with optional Bluetooth adapter	Yes, with optional Bluetooth adapter	Yes, with optional Bluetooth adapter	No	Yes
	2.5x7x5 inches	5.7x5.1x17.1 inches	14.7x15.1x10.4 inches	16.1x22.6x7.33 inches	8.8 x18.8x14.7 inches
	Photographers who want to print anywhere	Those who want a small, unobtrusive photo printer	Home-office users who want a dedicated photo printer	An office that needs a reliable printer with photo abilities	A home-office user on a budget
	Optional battery-powered printing	Easy print control via 3.5-inch touchscreen LCD	Its 7-inch LCD touchscreen	Prints borderless 13x9 photos in less than 2 minutes	Photo prints cost ten cents with Kodak Value Pack (not included)
	\$99.99	\$149.99	\$249.99	\$349.99	\$199.99
					
	8495853	8353845	8354041	7945389	8250304

# Perfect Pairs

## Tote Your Laptop In Style

Just as we use our computers for different purposes, we have our own needs and uses for notebook bags. Whether you're a multimedia enthusiast who needs extra space for her media or a professional who travels and relies on her notebook for critical business files, there's a laptop and bag for you. Check out some of the notebook and bag combinations we found. **FG**

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

### Apple MacBook 13-inch White 2.16GHz

Starting at \$1,299  
www.apple.com

If you're accustomed to working on a Mac and don't want to give up that familiarity, check out the Apple MacBook. This Intel-based machine runs the Mac OS X v10.4 (Tiger). Also included on the system are Spotlight, QuickTime, and iLife '06, which includes iTunes, iPhoto, iMovie HD, iDVD, iWeb, and GarageBand.



### Incuse Notebook 13" Neoprene Sleeve

\$34.95  
goincase.com

Protect your MacBook, without adding bulk, using this Incase Notebook Sleeve. Made of a durable neoprene, this sleeve can function as a standalone case or you can put it inside another bag.

**Perfect For:** Apple lovers who love to travel

### Gateway ML3109

\$549.99  
www.gateway.com

With built-in wireless and pre-loaded Microsoft Works 8.5, you'll be able to study from nearly anywhere on campus. When the weekend hits and you're ready for some downtime, upload pictures from your digital camera using the built-in card reader or watch a movie using the DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive. Perhaps best of all, this notebook won't overextend your budget.



### Swiss Gear Maxxum Computer Backpack GA-7303-06

\$71.99  
www.wengerna.com

Backpacks are a normal part of life around many college campuses. Instead of toting your notebook in a traditional backpack, haul it around campus in safety and style. The Maxxum backpack has a padded computer storage section along with a compartment for your CD/MP3 player, a built-in business organizer, and plenty of additional space for your books.

**Perfect For:** College students on a limited budget



### Compaq Presario C563NR

\$549.99  
www.hp.com

For a relatively affordable price, this notebook will give you all the basics along with a few extras, including a DVD±RW/CD-RW drive with LightScribe labeling technology. LightScribe lets you burn labels directly on compatible discs for a professional look.

### Swiss Gear Angle Computer Sleeve GA-7434-01

\$34.99  
www.wengerna.com



Just because you don't need all of the bells and whistles on a laptop doesn't mean you have to carry it around in a plain-Jane case. This stylish bag from Swiss Gear has a lightweight design made with durable poly and neoprene.

**Perfect For:** Anyone who needs a basic, no-frills computer





### HP Pavilion dv9575nr

\$1,999.99  
www.hp.com

Enjoy crisp, high-definition movies on this notebook's HD DVD drive and its 17-inch WXGA high-definition widescreen display. A built-in TV tuner and Windows Vista Ultimate give you even more entertainment options. You can also stay connected to friends and family using the integrated Pavilion WebCam with microphone.

### Targus 17" CityGear Miami Messenger Notebook Case

\$49.99  
www.targus.com

Whether you're heading to a local coffee shop or traveling around the country, this bag will protect your notebook and give you extra space for your accessories. This bag has a zip-down workstation that holds your business cards, media, PDA, and other accessories. It also comes with a removable mobile phone pouch and a hidden water bottle pocket.

**Perfect For:** Entertainment enthusiasts



### Sony VAIO VGN-SZ650N/C

\$2,049.99  
www.sonystyle.com

The weight of a notebook is quite possibly the most important feature to frequent travelers. Of course, that's not to say you're willing to sacrifice functionality. Weighing just 4 pounds and measuring 1.5 inches thick, the Sony VAIO VGN-SZ650N/C gives you portability and function. This laptop features Intel Centrino Duo processor technology, Wi-Fi connectivity, and a biometric fingerprint sensor for secured access.

### Samsonite LP350 EVA Hardshell Laptop Pillow

\$80  
www.samsonite.com

Your work laptop contains a lot of your important information. Give it extra protection when you travel by carrying your laptop in this hard-shell notebook case. This case also has a front organizer pocket for pens, a cell phone, a PDA, and other items.

**Perfect For:** Road warriors who are always on the go



### Toshiba Satellite A205-S7468

\$1,149.99  
www.toshibadirect.com

The Satellite A205-S7468's DVD Super-Multi drive lets you burn your own DVDs, watch movies, and more. Plus, this notebook comes with Ulead DVD MovieFactory 5 to help you create and burn your own movies. Upload pictures from your digital camera using the built-in media reader, and you have everything you'll need to start creating a memorable slide show.

**Perfect For:** Multimedia users looking for portability

### Targus 15.4" Brilliance Convertible Notebook Case

\$79.99  
www.targus.com

For flexibility, you can wear this bag as either a messenger bag or a backpack. Regardless, this nylon case will ably hold your laptop and other electronic devices. Its dedicated compartments, such as the MP3 player pocket with a headphone port, protect your gadgets. There are also places for your PDA and cell phone.



# Computer Shopping Tips

## A Wireless Router

BY CHRIS DUNKER

**W**ireless Internet routers can help you achieve computing flexibility at home or on the road. With so many different models to choose from, you need to make sure you select the right one. Here are some tips to keep in mind.

While shopping for a wireless router, you'll find these devices use different versions of 802.11. Version 802.11g runs at the same speed as version 802.11a, but it's five times faster than 802.11b. The first wireless protocol, 802.11b, operates on the same frequency as 802.11g, and 802.11g is compliant with all 802.11b devices. 802.11n is the latest Wi-Fi protocol under development, and it's currently available on the market. It uses a different technology than earlier versions of 802.11 but should remain compatible with 802.11a/b/g. With so many wireless protocols available, you'll need to look for a router that matches your devices' wireless specifications or make sure it's backward-compatible.

Wireless routers have varying signal ranges and strengths, so be sure to find one that will give you Internet access from wherever you need it. Typically, wireless routers have a range of 90 to 100 feet indoors and 300 to 400 feet outdoors. However, if you are looking for a router that can produce a large signal range a router with 802.11n will best suit your needs. An 802.11n model will offer more range than 802.11a/b/g models.

Wireless routers come with two antennae options, internal or external, so you'll need to decide what will work best for you. External antennae tend to transmit better and have greater range, and they can fold up when you want to take your router on the road. On the other hand, routers with an internal antenna don't broadcast as well, and they often include a port for connecting an external antenna (which you'll need to purchase separately), which will amplify the router range.

Wireless networks need security; otherwise, unauthorized users may be able to access your network. The latest router models come with built-in firewalls and various security standards. If the router you're looking at doesn't include a firewall, you should install a software firewall for added security.

If you're not ready to make the jump to an entirely wireless network, there are wireless routers that can work with both wireless and wired networks. These routers include ports for your wired devices, and the number of ports can vary. To make shopping easier, make a list of your wired devices ahead of time, and you can shop for a router with the correct number of ports you need.

### SHOPPING CHECKLIST

#### ☐ What is the router's wireless range?

- ☐ Up to 100 feet
- ☐ Up to 150 feet
- ☐ Up to 250 feet
- ☐ More than 250 feet

#### ☐ What version of 802.11 does the router support?

- ☐ 802.11a
- ☐ 802.11b
- ☐ 802.11g
- ☐ 802.11n

#### ☐ Do you need a router with wired network support?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

#### ☐ What type of antenna does the router have?

- ☐ External
- ☐ Internal

#### ☐ Notes

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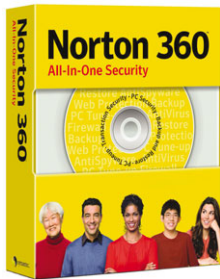
# Computers

## 5 Must-Have Accessories

If you have a computer, you're undoubtedly going to want a few accessories to go with it. Here, we'll mention five that we consider necessities to our computing experiences. **EG**

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

**1 Software:** A security program and a productivity suite are must-haves for any computer. The Internet is amazing in minutes, you can catch up on the latest national and local news, book plane and hotel reservations for holiday travel, and chat in real time with your sister in Baltimore. But malicious programs, such as viruses and spyware, are a fact of connected life. A good security suite with antivirus and firewall components will help minimize the threats you encounter. Office productivity suites usually include word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation programs (at minimum). With a word processor, such as Microsoft



Word, you can create mail merges and professional reports, and you can set up spreadsheets to track the books you've read with your book club and how your marathon training is going.

**2 External Storage:** An external drive, such as the Hitachi H31000U (\$419.99; [www.hitachi.com](http://www.hitachi.com)), lets you easily back up your data. Its 1TB will give you cavernous amounts of space to which you can back up your entire system or just the pictures of your kids, financial data, or even a favorite movie or TV show. You might consider an external DVD drive, such as the LG DVD Writer GSA-E40L (\$99.99; [us.lge.com](http://us.lge.com)), which supports USB 2.0 and is Windows Vista compatible, so you can back up the info on your hard drive to CD or DVD and store the discs somewhere outside your home. External drives usually attach to your computer pretty easily with either a FireWire or USB 2.0 cable.



**3 Printer:** If you want to make a copy of a friend's eggnog recipe, scan in invoices related to your home-improvement project, or print an occasional digital photo, you'll appreciate an all-in-one device that lets you print, copy, and scan. Many of these devices let you print borderless 4x6 pictures directly from your camera (or memory card), too. To do so, however, the camera and printer will both have to be PictBridge compatible. To print from a memory card, the printer needs a compatible card slot.

**4 Backup Power:** We're nearing the end of thunderstorm season and gearing up for ice storms, which can wreak havoc with power lines. Power outages can damage or destroy delicate electronics. Protect your computer (and data) with a power conditioner. All of the units provide surge protection, and some feature battery backup so you have a few minutes to save your data and shut down your computer and peripherals in a sudden loss of power.



**5 Cleaning Supplies:** Computers, and especially keyboards and mice, present unique cleaning challenges. They are dust and fingerprint magnets, but they're hard to keep clean because you shouldn't use alcohol-based or abrasive cleaners or even plain old water on any of the components. Antistatic wipes help keep the dust off of delicate LCDs, and compressed air will blow the dust and crumbs from among the keys on your keyboard. Most often, antistatic wipes are safe to use on notebook screens and CRTs, as well.







# Computers

## Top 5 Things To Know



o matter what your skill level, there are a few basics you should know in order to enjoy the most productive, safest computing experience possible. Here are our Top 5.

**1 Prevent data loss.** If you're in the market for a new computer, it's smart to know exactly what extras you're going to want or need to go with your big purchase. Besides the keyboard, mouse, monitor, and tower, you'll want to get a good surge protector. This will keep your new investment safe from damage as a result of a power outage or electrical surge. Even better than a surge protector, a UPS (uninterruptible power supply) has a backup battery that will keep power flowing smoothly for a few minutes after an outage. This will give you time to save your work and properly shut down the computer to avoid data loss.

**2 Protect yourself.** If you plan to go online, antivirus and firewall software are two must-haves for computer protection. There are many third-party products available for both antivirus and firewall protection, but you may elect to use built-in programs such as Windows XP's firewall or Vista's Windows Security Center. (Built-in antivirus is not available with WinXP or Vista.) Regardless of what protective software you decide to use, make sure you keep it enabled and set to the product's recommended settings. The trick to

ensuring your firewall and antivirus do their jobs is that you have to keep them up-to-date. Most programs have a method for allowing you to manually (or your computer to automatically) check for updates so the software can detect new viruses, scams, and other threats.

**3 Perform backups.** Even if you have been vigilant about performing routine maintenance, you'll likely experience a computer crash at some point. Whether it's a problem with your operating system or a burned-out hardware component, unless you have backed up the information, you may not be able to retrieve it—ever. Avoid this headache by scheduling regular backups. Once you've backed up your files and/or hard drive to an external drive, copy important files to a DVD and further secure your important data by storing it at an offsite location.


**4 Consult an expert.** If you have a computer problem you can't fix, find help. Clicking through error messages or putting up with slow processing speeds is annoying and can be a sign of a larger problem. Before you lose your valuable time and data, get a professional to straighten things out.

There are many options, including Best Buy's Geek Squad ([www.bestbuy.com/geeksquad](http://www.bestbuy.com/geeksquad)). This "24-hour computer support task force" offers carry-in, phone, and onsite support. The squad also makes house calls.

**5 Budget for extras.** Shopping for new computers these days is pretty tempting. It's easy to find a system for around \$500, but don't let that low number fool you. Remember that owning a computer comes with some additional expenses. For starters, some computers at the sub-\$500 price point don't include a monitor, so you'll need to remember to include one in your budget. Also, if you don't already have a printer or USB cable for your printer, you'll need to include this, too. Another thing to consider is your monthly ISP fee, and looking into whether you'll have to pay for a high-speed modem and installation or if they're included. Other extras could include productivity software such as Microsoft Office (you won't get this with a sub-\$500 PC, either), security software subscription fees, printer ink and paper, and a digital camera. **FG**

BY JENNIE SCHLUETER

# Glossary Of Computing Terms



**S**hopping for a computer can be intimidating, especially with all of the complex terminology. Here we explain some common computer jargon.

**Bluetooth**—A short-range wireless standard that connects devices, such as computers, printers, PDAs, and digital cameras. It allows these devices and their users to communicate with one another.

**broadband**—Network connections that transmit high-speed Internet access. Cable companies can offer network speeds up to 8 to 11Mbps (megabits per second), whereas phone companies offer DSL (Digital Subscriber Line), which can support maximum speeds of 3 to 5Mbps. And, although not widely available, some power companies are exploring the possibility of offering high-speed Internet access to their customers, as well.

**CRT**—An old analog display technology for TVs and computer monitors. It features an electron gun illuminating phosphor dots that line the inside of a glass tube. When the phosphors are lit, they display on-screen images. CRTs consume a great deal of power and are heavy and bulky. Although many CRTs support digital signals, they degrade when converted to analog.

**dual-core processor**—This integrated circuit, which controls the computer,

features two processors, each with its own cache, on a single die or chassis. In a dual-core configuration, the operating system has two processors to handle instructions, speeding up the computer and its ability to multitask.

**Ethernet**—A widely used LAN protocol in which computers and networks are physically linked.

**firewall**—Hardware or software that limits access by a network or another outside source to your computer; it also may limit your computer's access to the network. These security measures are designed to protect your computer from outsiders who'd like to exploit it in some way. By the same token, firewalls may prevent infected files on your computer from accessing the larger network and spreading the problem to other users.

**LAN**—A group of computers that are physically connected by wires so they can communicate with one another and share information.

**LCD**—This digital display technology sandwiches liquid crystals between thin sheets of glass. The crystals twist and untwist to allow and block light from a backlight, forming the images you see. LCDs are thinner, lighter, and consume less power than CRTs. Initially used mostly in notebook PCs, you'll now find LCD TVs and computer monitors, as

well as LCDs on digital cameras, cell phones, portable DVD players, and PDAs, among others.

**office suite**—Productivity software, such as Microsoft Office, StarOffice, and Open Office, that often includes word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, database, and financial components.

**operating system**—The software, such as Windows XP, Windows Vista, or Mac OS X, that controls a computer and its peripherals and serves as the primary interface for the users.




**processor**—Also known as a microprocessor or the CPU (central processing unit), this integrated circuit controls the computer.

**RAM**—Random-access memory is a standard type of memory that's read from and written to by the CPU and hardware.


**upgradeable**—This term refers to the ability to add or swap out hardware to boost a computer's performance, increase its speed, or replace a defective or obsolete device or component. For instance, you may add more memory; replace an old CRT with a widescreen LCD; or swap out an older graphics card for a newer one that features an ATSC TV tuner so you can watch digital TV on your computer. Look for a computer with expansion slots or empty bays.

## Which Notebook Computer Is Best For You?

A notebook computer is a pretty big purchase for most people, and it's usually a bit overwhelming, too. This chart compares the features and specs from several models available at Best Buy ([www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)) and recommends models based on certain lifestyles.




What It Is	What It Means	Compaq Presario C571NR	Gateway C-5815	HP Pavilion HDX9010NR
<b>Operating system</b>	The software (usually Windows or Mac OS X) that controls your computer	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Business	Windows Vista Ultimate
<b>Processor</b>	The chip that controls the computer (in general, the bigger the number, the better)	1.73GHz Intel Pentium Dual-Core T2080	1.06GHz Intel Core 2 Duo Mobile ULV	2.2GHz Intel Centrino Core 2 Duo Mobile T7500
<b>Hard drive size</b>	How much information the computer can hold	80GB	120GB	240GB
<b>Optical drives</b>	Drives that can read and write discs such as CD-Rs, DVD-RWs, or HD DVDs	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW with LightScribe
<b>RAM</b>	Memory that is read from and written to by the processor and hardware; the more, the better	1GB DDR2 SDRAM	1GB PC2-5300 DDR2	2GB PC 6400 DDR2
<b>Screen size</b>	The diagonal measurement of the notebook's screen	15.4 inches	12.1 inches	20.1 inches
<b>Media card reader</b>	A slot that lets you use media cards without a separate peripheral	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Coollest feature</b>		Multiformat optical drive	Fingerprint reader for security	Integrated PVR (personal video recorder)
<b>Perfect for</b>		College students who want to work and play	Adjusting only the screen for a better view	Watching TV and movies on your laptop
<b>MSRP</b>		From \$599.99	\$1,399.99	\$2,999.99
		 8404158	 8390154	 8477141







	Sony VAIO VGN-CR123E	Sony VAIO VGN-SZ650N/C	Toshiba Satellite U305-S5077	Apple MacBook MB062LL/A	Asus GIS-X1
	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Business	Windows Vista Home Premium	Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger	Windows Vista Home Premium
	2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo Mobile T7300	2.2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo Mobile	1.73GHz Intel Core 2 Duo Mobile	2.16GHz Intel Core 2 Duo Mobile	2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo Mobile
	160GB	160GB	160GB	120GB	160GB
	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW	SuperMulti DVD± RW/CD-RW with LightScribe support
	1GB PC2-4200 DDR2	2GB PC2-5300 DDR2	2GB DDR2 SDRAM	1GB PC2-5300 DDR2 SDRAM	2GB PC2-5300 DDR2 SDRAM
	14.1 inches	13.3 inches	13.3 inches	13.3 inches	15.4 inches
	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	Built-in wireless support for 802.11a/b/g/n	Its weight; at 4 pounds, it's highly mobile	Fingerprint reader	Loaded with software	Nvidia GeForce Go 8600M GT graphics card
	Students who need a bit of mobility	Users who like to stay connected to family and friends	Road warriors who want functionality and security	Mobile users who appreciate wireless connectivity	Gamers who also want mobility
	\$1,249.99	\$2,049.99	\$899.99	\$1,299	\$1,749.99
					
	8504148	8450259	8403596	8376125	8397594

## Which Desktop PC Is Right For You?

When you shop for a desktop PC, you'll see lots of similar deals. The comparison chart below shows how subtle—yet important—the differences can be. If you can't find one of these on Best Buy's Web site ([www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)), visit or call your local Best Buy store, and it should be available there.

What It Is	What It Means	Acer Aspire ASE 380-UD480A	Apple Mac mini	Sony VAIO VGC-LS30E
<b>Processor</b>	The chip that controls the computer (in general, the bigger the number, the better)	AMD Athlon 64 X2 2.4GHz	Intel Core 2 Duo 2GHz	Intel Pentium Dual Core T2080 1.73GHz
<b>Hard drive size</b>	How much information the computer can hold	400GB	120GB	250GB
<b>RAM</b>	The memory a computer uses to run all PC applications	2GB	1GB	2GB
<b>Optical drives</b>	Drives that can read and write discs such as CD-Rs, DVD-RWs, or HD DVDs	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW	Slot-loading combo DVD-ROM/CD-RW drive	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW
<b>Operating system</b>	The software (usually Windows or Mac OS X) that controls your computer	Windows Vista Home Premium	Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger	Windows Vista Home Premium
<b>Loaded software</b>	Preinstalled applications for performing specific tasks	MS Works 8.5, Money 2006, CyberLink Power2Go, and more	iLife '06, iWork, MS Office 2004 for Mac Test Drive, and more	Microsoft Works 8.5, Sony Click To DVD, and more
<b>Graphics card</b>	Controls the quality of your video and images	Nvidia GeForce 6100 and nForce 430MCP	Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 950	Nvidia GeForce GO 7400 GT
<b>Ports</b>	Sockets that give your computer access to different peripherals	8 USB 2.0 (4 front, 4 rear); 1 FireWire; 1 serial; 1 parallel	4 USB 2.0; 1 FireWire	4 USB 2.0; 1 FireWire
<b>Best for</b>		Managing and storing multimedia	Style-conscious users who like power	Watching and recording live TV
<b>Coollest feature</b>		Processor—one of the best on the market	The amazing array of software	TV tuner and 19-inch widescreen display
<b>Best Buy price (before any rebate)</b>		\$599.99	\$799	\$1,799.99
		 8432895	 8480315	 8355745

	<b>Velocity Micro E2045</b>	<b>Gateway GM5472</b>	<b>Gateway GT5482E</b>	<b>HP Pavilion Media Center m8120n</b>	<b>HP Pavilion a6114x</b>
	AMD Athlon 64 X2 Dual Core 2.33GHz	AMD Athlon 64 X2 2.6GHz	AMD Athlon 64 X2 3GHz	Intel Core 2 Quad Q6600 2.4GHz	Intel Core 2 Quad 2.1GHz
	400GB	500GB	400GB	640GB	320GB
	2GB	2GB	3GB	3GB PC2 5300 DDR2	2GB
	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW	Double-layer DVD±RW/CD-RW	SuperMulti DVD±RW/CD-RW with LightScribe	SuperMulti DVD±RW/CD- RW w/LightScribe
	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows Vista Home Premium
	Adobe Acrobat Reader 8.0, Ahead Nero Burning Suite	Digital Image Starter, CyberLink Power- 2Go, and more	Microsoft Works 8.5, CyberLink Power2Go, Adobe Acrobat Reader	MS Works 8, muvee autoProducer, Roxio Creator, and more	Works 8, Adobe Reader 7, Roxio Creator
	Nvidia GeForce 8600 GT	Nvidia GeForce 6150 SE	Nvidia GeForce 6150 SE	Nvidia GeForce 7530LE	Nvidia GeForce 6150 SE
	6 USB; 1 parallel; 2 FireWire; 1 S-Video; 2 DVI	6 USB; 2 FireWire; 1 serial; 1 parallel; 1 S-Video	6 USB; 2 FireWire; 1 serial; 1 parallel	6 USB (2 front, 4 rear); 2 FireWire; 1 S- Video	6 USB 2.0; 2 FireWire
	Budget-conscious gamers	Television lovers	Multimedia lovers on a budget	The whole family	Budget-conscious buyers
	Expansion slots for future growth	Built-in ATSC/NTSC TV tuner	3GB RAM expand- able to 4GB	15-in-1 memory card reader in front panel	Its affordable price
	\$1,399.99	\$729.99	\$699.99	\$1,149.99	\$549.99
					
	8493819	8398806	8486747	8398593	8486676



# Trifecta Of Fun

## Gaming Systems Compared

If you're thinking about buying a video game console for the kids, make sure they'll share it with you. While the Nintendo Wii is still focused mainly on games, the current crop of

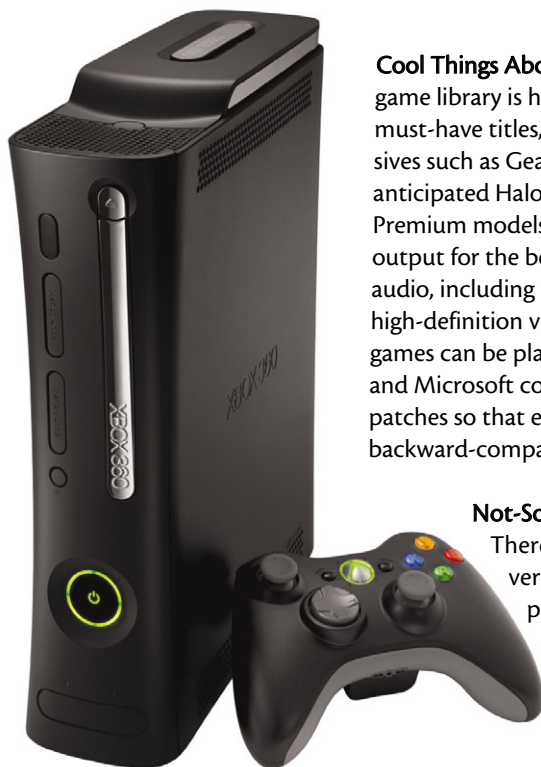
consoles offers more than ever with Internet connectivity and multimedia playback features. Not only that, but some gaming systems are so robust they can serve as the centerpiece of

your home-theater setup. Read on to find out which one is right for you. **FG**

BY TRACY BAKER

### Microsoft Xbox 360

\$349.99 (Premium), \$449.99 (Elite); [www.xbox.com](http://www.xbox.com)



**Cool Things About It:** The Xbox 360's game library is huge and packed with must-have titles, including many exclusives such as Gears Of War and the much-anticipated Halo 3. The Elite and newer Premium models have standard HDMI output for the best possible video and audio, including 720p, 1080i, and 1080p high-definition video. Most popular Xbox games can be played on the Xbox 360, and Microsoft continues to develop patches so that even more games are backward-compatible.

**Not-So-Cool Things About It:** There are so many different versions of this console that picking one is confusing. Avoid older Premium models that don't have HDMI output, and be aware that

you need to buy a separate accessory to watch high-definition DVDs.

**Awesome Accessories:** The HD DVD add-on (\$179.99; [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)) turns the Xbox 360 into one of the best and least expensive HD DVD players available (especially if your unit has HDMI output). Get a Quick Charge Kit (\$29.99; [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)) to keep the wireless controller powered, and also consider a Logitech Harmony Advanced Universal Remote for Xbox 360 (\$129.99; [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)) so you can easily use the device as a DVD and HD DVD player.

**Best Games:** BioShock, Gears Of War, Forza Motorsport 2

**Perfect For:** Hardcore gamers who want access to the hottest high-def games

### THE BOTTOM LINE

The Xbox 360's extensive game library makes it an ideal choice for gamers, and the optional HD DVD add-on is terrific for HDTV owners.

## Nintendo Wii

\$249.99; [www.nintendo.com](http://www.nintendo.com)

### Cool Things About It:

Without a doubt, the motion-sensing controller is what separates the Wii from the pack. It's perfect for sports games and tilt sensors also make it great for driving games because you can turn it like a steering wheel. It's also so intuitive that anyone from a toddler to a great-grandpa can play along with the rest of the family.

Although the Wii isn't nearly as powerful, there are still a lot of cross-platform games

available for it. You can enjoy the fabulous first-party Nintendo games featuring popular characters such as Mario that the other consoles will never get. It also is compatible with GameCube games and comes with an integrated Web browser.

### Not-So-Cool Things About It:

The Wii has widescreen and 480p support but does not support high-definition resolutions. The graphics in cross-platform games such as Madden NFL 08 are not

nearly as good as they are on the other consoles, and the system doesn't play DVD movies, HD DVDs, or Blu-ray Discs.

### Awesome Accessories:

Component video cables (\$29.95; [www.nintendo.com](http://www.nintendo.com)) are a must if your TV supports 480p, and you should also pick up a copy of Wii Play (\$49.99) as it bundles an extra Wimote with the game.

**Best Games:** Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Super Paper Mario

**Perfect For:** The entire family



### THE BOTTOM LINE

Only gamers need apply thanks to minimal multimedia features, but this is a console the whole family can enjoy.

## Sony PlayStation 3

\$499.99 (60GB), \$599.99 (80GB); [www.us.playstation.com](http://www.us.playstation.com)

**Cool Things About It:** The PS3 plays Blu-ray Discs, and it's one of the most



full-featured Blu-ray players available for any price. It also upconverts standard DVDs to high-definition, so most HDTV owners will have no qualms about using it as their sole playback device. PS3 games look just as good as their Xbox 360 counterparts, and Sony is known for cranking out fabulous exclusives such as the Ratchet & Clank series. It'll also play nearly all PlayStation 2 and PlayStation titles.

**Not-So-Cool Things About It:** The controllers and remote control use Bluetooth technology instead of infrared, so without a special accessory you can't control the PS3 using a universal remote. This console's game library overall is small compared to the competition but that could change in the future.

### Awesome Accessories:

An HDMI cable lets you

unleash the best possible picture and sound quality. Also, be sure to pick up Sony's official Blu-ray Remote Control (\$24.99; [www.sonymstyle.com](http://www.sonymstyle.com)).

**Best Games:** Ninja Gaiden Sigma, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Resistance: Fall Of Man

**Perfect For:** Movie lovers and gadget gurus who also want to play games

### THE BOTTOM LINE

The PS3 currently has a small gaming library but is a multimedia powerhouse that will showcase the capabilities of your HDTV and audio gear.

# iPod Gadgets & Gizmos For All

## The Best Gifts For The iPod Fans On Your List

If you are shopping for the perfect gift for an iPod owner (or yourself), you are in luck. There are plenty of iPod accessories available at a range of price points, so you should have no problem finding the right gift for your favorite iPod owner this holiday season.

### JBL Radial Micro Portable Music Station for Apple iPod

This all-in-one speaker and dock from JBL (\$299.95; [www.jbl.com](http://www.jbl.com)) has a unique vertical, circular design that forms an 8-inch-high ring around an iPod model with a dock connector. The Radial Micro Portable Music Station

also comes with a remote control so you can control your iPod from across the room.

### Liz Claiborne Wristlet Case for Apple iPod Video

This fun and stylish neoprene case (\$31.99; [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)) is for a video iPod. The case leaves the iPod's controls, ports, and dock easily accessible. Also, the removable wristlet strap offers a convenient way to carry your video iPod.

### Belkin Pocket Blues for 2nd-Generation Apple iPod nano

Another trendy case is the Belkin Denim Folio Case for 2nd-Generation Apple iPod nano (\$24.99; [www.belkin.com](http://www.belkin.com)). It's made of denim and has a removable clip so you can choose the best way to carry your nano. In addition, if you select the pink-and-brown model, \$2.50 of your purchase will go toward the Susan G. Komen for the Cure organization.

### Griffin Tempo Arm Band Case for 2nd-Generation Apple iPod shuffle

A great gift for the active 2G shuffle user on your list is Griffin's Tempo Arm Band Case (\$14.99; [www.griffintechology.com](http://www.griffintechology.com)). The armband is designed for comfort and made from a breathable elastic fabric. It's also machine-washable, so you can keep it clean when you work up a sweat listening to your shuffle at the gym.

### DLO Care Kit for Apple iPod

One of the best iPod accessories isn't flashy at all, but it will keep your iPod itself flashy and attractive. DLO's Care Kit for Apple iPod (\$29.99; [www.dlo.com](http://www.dlo.com)) can help you remove scratches and small nicks from the surface of most iPods. Each Care Kit comes with three bottles, one for each phase of a three-step repair and cleaning process. The kit also includes four cleaning cloths and a microfiber polishing cloth. **FG**

BY KYLEE DICKEY

## Check For Compatibility

There have been many types and sizes of iPods over the years, so it should come as no surprise that you should keep compatibility in mind when shopping for iPod accessories. Make sure you know what type of iPod each gift recipient has so that you can buy accessories that work with it. This is especially true of the new iPod touch, 3G iPod nano, and redesigned iPod classic. Special accessories for these new products were not available at press time, but by the time the holidays arrive, you will no doubt find plenty on store shelves. If you have questions regarding compatibility, ask a sales associate for assistance. Also, remember to ask for a gift receipt when you check out. ●



Liz Claiborne Wristlet Case  
for Apple iPod Video  
\$31.99 • [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



# Cell Phone Service Plans

## Best Buy's Mobile Plans Have Got You Covered

**C**hoosing a cell phone and service plan from all the available market options can be a long, time-draining process. But the Best Buy Web site makes comparison shopping easy. The details of available individual and family plans and phones from three cell phone carriers—AT&T, Sprint PCS (which included Nextel),

and Verizon Wireless—are clearly explained.

All the plans from Best Buy require a two-year commitment and an activation fee of about \$36. If you break the terms of the contract, you will need to pay an early termination fee of at least \$175 to \$200. Higher-priced plans come with unlimited minutes. But for those that don't, you'll pay about 45 cents for each additional

minute. And text messaging, where available, costs 10 to 15 cents for each message.

To give you a better idea of which features and phones come with the service plans, we'll sneak a peek at the basic plan from each carrier.

### All In The Family

Best Buy's service providers sell around 25 family plans,

which cost anywhere from \$59.99 up to \$299.99 per month. Most additional lines—anywhere from three to five per plan—cost \$9.99 per month from three of the carriers. Some of these plans allow unlimited minutes between phones on the same plan, and perhaps limitless text messages. **FG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH



Like the basic plan from AT&T, the Sprint PCS Basic Plan offers you a tempting choice of phones: the BlackBerry 8703e and 8830 World Edition; the LG Muziq LX570; the Motorola KRZR K1m and RAZR V3m; the Palm Treo 700p, 700wx, and 755p; and a number of phones from Samsung and Sanyo.

For \$29.99 a month, you get 200 anytime minutes, unlimited night and weekend minutes, and unlimited mobile-to-mobile minutes to other Sprint PCS phones. Call forwarding, call waiting, voicemail, caller ID, three-way calling, Internet access, and text messaging are included.



Phones for this plan include multimedia phones, such as the BlackBerry Curve 8300, Motorola KRZR K1, Nokia 6126, Palm Treo 750, and Samsung BlackJack i607. Other phones, such as the Motorola RAZR V3 and Samsung Sync, come in a variety of colors.

The AT&T Nation 450 w/ Roll-over costs \$39.99 per month. You get 450 anytime minutes, 5,000 night and weekend minutes, and unlimited mobile-to-mobile minutes. Call forwarding, call waiting, caller ID, three-way calling, voicemail, and access to the Web are included.



Verizon Wireless America's Choice 450 lets you choose from Motorola phones (the RAZR V3m, SLVR L7c, and KRZR K1m among them) and LG phones, including the Chocolate and enV VX9900, both multimedia phones. Smartphones, such as the Motorola Q, BlackBerry 8830 World Edition, and Palm Treo 700w, are also available

The \$39.99 monthly fee gives you 450 anytime minutes, unlimited night and weekend minutes, and unlimited mobile-to-mobile minutes. Call forwarding, call waiting, caller ID, Internet access, and three-way calling are included.

# Wireless Shopping Tips

## A Bluetooth Headset For Your Cell Phone

BY MARTY SEMS

**I**f you spend a great deal of time on your cell, you're a prime candidate for a Bluetooth headset. A wireless earphone/microphone set can free your hands to do other things, such as work or exercise. Clip this page and take it shopping with you to help you find a headset that's right for you.

Bluetooth headsets cost about \$32 to \$200. Many have amazing features, but keep in mind that some features will only work if your phone supports them, too.

Believe it or not, the most important thing about a headset is how comfortable it feels to wear. If it bothers your ear, or if it feels too heavy or too tight, you'll wear it less and less often. It doesn't matter how good a headset is; if it's not on your head, it's not going to do you any good.

You may not be able to "try before you buy" with a product that fits inside your ear, but Best Buy has a generous 30-day return policy. Spend some time with your new Bluetooth headset to make sure that it sounds as good as you expect. You can make some calls to test the reception, but remember that the headset will only sound as good as the cell phone's signal. If your phone can play music, a song or two can give you the best impression of a headset's sound quality.

Remember that the longer the talk and standby times, the heavier the battery is likely to be. That translates

into more fatigue for you, the wearer. It's ironic, but a headset's super-long talk time won't matter much to you if its weight makes you want to take it off after a couple of hours.

Some headsets support upscale Bluetooth features, which can come in handy if your phone supports them, too. A2DP (Advanced Audio Distribution Profile) can make music and calls sound clearer than with basic Bluetooth. AVRCP (Audio Video Remote Control Profile) lets you control functions on your phone with the headset's buttons, such as Redial, Reject Call, and several others. Some headsets also let you dial numbers with voice commands.

Finally, there's another "headset" alternative that you don't even have to wear on your head. A "hands-free" kit is basically a speakerphone for your cell. These are typically made to install in your car, so you can take calls without having to take your hand off the wheel and your eyes off the road. One example is Motorola's T605 Bluetooth Automotive Music & Hands-free System (\$249.99; [www.motorola.com](http://www.motorola.com)).

### SHOPPING CHECKLIST

#### ☐ How many hours of talk time does it provide?

- ☐ five
- ☐ eight
- ☐ 10

#### ☐ How many standby hours does it offer?

- ☐ 100
- ☐ 200
- ☐ 300

#### ☐ Which standards and features does it support?

- ☐ Bluetooth 1.1
- ☐ Bluetooth 1.2
- ☐ Bluetooth 2.0
- ☐ A2DP
- ☐ AVRCP

#### ☐ How easy to use are its volume features?

- ☐ Volume control
- ☐ Mute
- ☐ Noise cancellation

#### ☐ What advanced features does it have?

- ☐ Caller ID display
- ☐ Phone controls (redial, end call, hold call, etc.)
- ☐ Vibrate and/or ringtone settings
- ☐ Easy switching to another Bluetooth device

CUT HERE

# Music Players

## 5 Must-Have Accessories

**N**ailing down a list of must-have accessories for an MP3 player is tricky. Just because an iPod dock for the kitchen tops your list, for example, doesn't mean it even cracks an avid jogger's Top 5. Ultimately, though, five general categories stand out, although other notable accessories include extra batteries, cleaning kits, and Bluetooth adapters.

### 1. Headphones.

A runner sometimes doesn't fare well with earbuds. They fall out due to the constant jostle of running, and this can become a burden for anyone hoping to get in a good workout. It's essential to match your earphones to your needs, or your experience will be diminished. A runner should opt for a headphone that's secure, and in this case, an in-the-ear earbud would be the ideal choice. Headphone styles are numerous and include wired/wireless earbuds, which are perfect for people on the go (students, mass transit users), and earcups, which can satisfy any audiophile's need to hear minute musical details.

### 2. Speakers/docks.

Whether your family's gathered around the table enjoying Grandma's apple pie or you're sitting on the porch watching the little ones collect autumn leaves, there's no limit to where you can listen to your MP3 player. You needn't let the pair of headphones it came with constrain you, either; portable speakers and docks are perfect for letting the entire group listen to tunes in open areas. In addition, most speakers have a dock to recharge your player's battery. Check your MP3 player manufacturer's Web site for model numbers of available speakers and docks, and you'll likely be able to buy it at Best Buy.

### 3. FM transmitter.

If you're motoring about in a truck or Trans Am for leisure or work, MP3 players can provide the soundtrack for that motion. To do so, you'll need an FM transmitter that can beam your MP3 player's tunes over your car radio. Connect the transmitter to your player, select a designated frequency on the car radio dial, tune to that same frequency on your transmitter, and you are listening to music, movies, podcasts, audiobooks, etc. Transmitters range from basic (maybe offering three presets) to sophisticated models (providing remote controls and visual interfaces), making it easy to find one that suits your needs.

### 4. Cases.

You decided to treat yourself and buy a high-end MP3 player. Because you've already spent so much, it's only right to assume that you have everything you need, right? Not quite. Although they're partially a vanity purchase, cases can protect your player from scratches, bumps, water, physical drops, and mishaps that can otherwise shorten your player's life. No matter what type of MP3 player you own, it's wise to purchase a case to protect it in different environments. Cases are relatively inexpensive (around \$20 and up) and can provide a little more insurance against any accidents or normal

wear and tear that can happen. Because not all cases will work with your player, check the MP3 player manufacturer's Web site or a retailer like Best Buy for ones that are compatible.

### 5. Armbands.

We all know that music is a huge exercise motivator. Although they're often overlooked, armbands can mean a difference between a workout you're proud of vs. one that's constantly interrupted by accidental drops and tugging, tangled cords. No matter your sport, an armband, such as Griffin's Tempo (\$24.99; [www.griffin-technology.com](http://www.griffin-technology.com)), which fits around your bicep, generally offers the most stability and comfort. Otherwise, a basic lanyard is an inexpensive, yet effective, alternative for less strenuous workouts. **FG**

BY BLAINE FLAMIG





# MP3 Players

## Top 5 Things To Know

**F**inding the perfect digital music player is all about asking the right questions. Here are the five most important things to keep in mind while shopping, along with the answers you'll want to hear before committing to a particular device.

### 1 Memory capacity.

The capacities listed for most MP3 players are based on low-quality audio recordings, which result in small file sizes. Songs recorded at a higher quality, which is probably what you'll prefer and be listening to most often, will take up more space, so you'll fit fewer songs on your player. For example, a player can store three times as many songs recorded at 64Kbps as those at 192Kbps, but the sound quality for the 192Kbps tracks is more than three times better than that of the 64Kbps tracks.

Where storage is concerned, there are 8 bits in a byte, 1,024 bytes in a KB (kilobyte), 1,024KB in a MB (megabyte), and 1,024MB in a GB (gigabyte). If you record tracks at 192Kbps, divide that number by eight to get 24KBps. There are 60 seconds in a minute, so that means your audio requires about 1,440KB (1.41MB) of storage per minute or about 84.5MB per hour. Therefore, each gigabyte of memory will hold about 12 hours of 192Kbps audio.

### 2 Type of memory.

Hard drives offer relatively high storage capacities at a relatively inexpensive price, but they have a lot of moving parts that tend to break if you drop the device, which often ruins the player beyond repair. Flash memory (also called solid-state memory) is more expensive per megabyte and gigabyte than hard drives, but because the memory uses no moving parts, it is more durable. Devices that use flash memory are terrific for running and exercising or other activities where you may shake or drop your player.

### 3 File format support.

Just as digital photos and movies use a variety of file formats, so do digital audio files. You'll see MP3, AAC (Advanced Audio Coding), WMA (Windows Media Audio), and FLAC (Free Lossless Audio Codec), to name a few. If you have already converted or downloaded a large amount of music in a particular format, make sure the player you want can handle it. If not, you can tailor your conversions and downloads to match the capabilities of the device.

### 4 File downloads.

Due to DRM (digital rights management) schemes and other factors, to download most tracks from Apple's iTunes Store ([www.itunes.com](http://www.itunes.com)), you'll need an iPod. However, Apple does offer a select



number of DRM-free tracks, if you're willing to spend 30 cents more. Subscription-based services, such as Napster To Go ([www.napster.com](http://www.napster.com)), let you download unlimited amounts of music, but they're only compatible with certain makes and models. On the other hand, Amazon's ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) music store won't keep you guessing about what music will play on your MP3 player, all of their music is DRM-free.

### 5 Battery life.

Official battery life measurements are performed in a lab and, as a consequence, don't always match real-world performance. First, ask the salespeople if they have any experience with the battery life of a product you are considering. Then, be sure to ask how long the batteries should last if you listen at a reasonable volume level (loud music consumes more electricity because the headphones require more power). Finally, you might also look for power-cutting options, such as the ability to turn off the screen's backlight and audio normalization (which tones down loud music). **FG**

BY TRACY BAKER

# MP3 Player Glossary

W

ho doesn't want an MP3 player? It can help you relax, provide motivation, and keep you up-to-date on news. When you head to your local Best Buy ([www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)) to snag one, make sure you have this glossary so you can choose the perfect model.

**AAC**—Short for Advanced Audio Coding, it is a competitor of the more popular MP3 file format.

**Click Wheel**—Apple's proprietary circular control on the front of the iPod.

**download**—In terms of digital music, downloading is when you retrieve a song from an Internet site or another network connection and save it to your computer or music player. You'll download songs from music service Web sites such as iTunes, Napster, or Rhapsody.

**DRM**—Digital rights management is a security mechanism for digital media. A common DRM scheme for digital music involves getting a license file to authorize playback of a free or purchased song.

**earbuds**—Small, circular devices you put into your ears that serve the same function as headphones. MP3 players come with their own earbuds, but you can, of course, purchase a separate pair that are more comfortable or of better quality.

**flash memory**—Solid-state memory with no moving parts that is lightweight and small. In terms of MP3 players, a flash-based player is lighter and smaller than a hard drive-based player, and it also won't skip. Thus, flash-based players are popular for use during exercising. However, the capacity of a flash drive isn't as large as a hard drive.

**FM tuner**—In MP3 players, a built-in FM tuner lets you listen to local radio.

**hard drive**—Storage in which rigid platters are inside a fixed casing. In terms of MP3 players, a hard drive-based player is larger and heavier than a flash-based player. Because of the moving parts (the platters), hard drive-based players are also prone to skipping. However, the capacities are much larger than flash-drive capacities.

**iTunes**—A digital media player application that loads onto your computer and lets you play, organize, and download and purchase music, videos, podcasts, and television shows for an iPod or computer.

**MP3**—Perhaps the most popular digital audio encoding format. It compresses audio to about one-twelfth the original size while still providing excellent sound. In general, a 1MB MP3 file will last about one minute.

**playlist**—A queue of songs a user creates to play on a computer, burn to a CD, or transfer to a digital audio player. The playlist includes only directions to the location of the songs, not the songs themselves.

**PlaysForSure**—A popular Microsoft certification that ensures portable devices, such as MP3 players, and media, such as digital music and videos, are compatible with each other.

**podcast**—A downloadable episode that is similar to a radio program. A user can subscribe to a podcast for



updated episodes, or she can download podcasts one at a time. A podcast is usually available in MP3 format.




**screen**—The display on the front of a portable music player. A player's screen can either display in color or black and white.

**WMA**—Windows Media Audio is a digital audio format created by Microsoft to compete with the MP3 format. WMA files are smaller than MP3 files.

**widescreen**—A screen with a 16:9 aspect ratio. In terms of music players, the Microsoft Zune and the Creative Zen Vision W are two that have widescreens.

## Which MP3 Player Is Best For You?

iPods are cool, sure, but you have other choices when it comes to listening to your tunes. This chart compares the most important—and coolest—features from select MP3 players available at Best Buy ([www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)).

		Hard Drive		
What It Is	What It Means	Apple iPod classic	Archos 504	Microsoft Zune
<b>Memory type</b>	Hard drive (moving parts, more capacity) or flash (no moving parts, lightweight, perfect for exercising)	Hard drive	Hard drive	Hard drive
<b>Capacities</b>	How much memory the player has (on models available at Best Buy)	80GB; 160GB	80GB	30GB
<b>Songs</b>	How many songs the player can hold	20,000; 40,000 (based on 4 minutes per song at 128Kbps AAC)	40,000 (based on 4 minutes per song at 128Kbps WMA)	7,500 (based on 4 minutes per song at 128Kbps WMA)
<b>Video capability</b>	Some MP3 players can play video, as well as music	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Colors</b>	Several players offer a variety of color choices	Black, silver	Silver	Black, white, brown, pink
<b>FM tuner</b>	Lets you listen to radio stations	No	No	Yes
<b>Music services supported</b>	Not all MP3 players can play songs from all music services	iTunes	Rhapsody	Zune Marketplace
<b>Battery life</b>	How long the battery will last when playing music	20 hours; 40 hours (music)	17 hours (music)	14 hours
<b>Perfect for</b>		Those interested in a storage device as much as a music player	Users who want to record programming from their televisions	Users who enjoy sharing and who might be hard on their devices
<b>Coolest feature</b>		It's an iPod: Need we say more?	4.3-inch widescreen	Wi-Fi lets you share music with other Zune users
<b>MSRP</b>		\$249; \$349	\$399.99	\$249.99
		 8500357	 8043681	 8330521




## Flash






	Apple iPod nano	Apple iPod touch	Insignia Pilot	Samsung YP-K3JQR	SanDisk Sansa e260R
	Flash	Flash	Flash	Flash	Flash
	4GB; 8GB	8GB; 16GB	4GB; 8GB	2GB	4GB
	1,000; 2,000 (based on 4 minutes per song at 128Kbps AAC)	1,750; 3,500 (based on 4 minutes per song at 64Kbps WMA)	N/A	500 (based on 4-minute songs at 128Kbps WMA)	1,000 (based on 4-minute songs at 128Kbps WMA)
	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	Silver (4GB); Black, silver, red, blue, green	Black	Black	Red	Silver with black accents
	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	iTunes	iTunes	Best Buy Digital Music Store; Rhapsody; iTunes	Best Buy Digital Music Store; Rhapsody	Best Buy Digital Music Store; Napster; Rhapsody
	24 hours	22 hours	25 hours	25 hours	20 hours
	Joggers; iPod lovers who aren't interested in carrying their entire library with them	Users who want a chic-looking player that supports multiple A/V formats	Users who also want to listen to audible book downloads from Audible.com	Audiophiles on a budget	Folks who want more features, such as video and an FM tuner, than an iPod nano
	Diminutive size	Its 3.5-inch touch-screen	Built-in support for Bluetooth audio	Light-up touchpad	MicroSD expansion slot for more memory
	\$149; \$199	\$299; \$399	\$139.99; 189.99	\$119.99	\$119.99
					
	8500534	8500393	8452863	8273272	8023122



## Which Cell Phone Is Right For You?

**Y**our cell phone is more than a phone—it can be a camera, music player, text messenger, and fashion statement. All these features and more make the cell phone the must-have electronics device. Compare the features of cell phones available at Best Buy ([www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)) to help find your next phone; we provide Best Buy's pricing (at press time), as well.

What It Is	What It Means	LG Muziq LX570	Samsung Sync SGH-a707	Motorola RAZR V3
<b>Form</b>	The physical style of the phone	Clamshell	Slider, internal antenna	Clamshell
<b>Bluetooth capability</b>	Enables wireless communication with other devices	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Internationally compatible</b>	Uses GSM standard used in Europe and Asia	No	No	No
<b>Voice-activated dialing</b>	Dial your contacts by simply speaking into the phone	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>MP3 player</b>	Plays digital music	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Service plan provider(s)</b>	What provider(s) the phone will work with	Sprint PCS	AT&T	AT&T
<b>Dimensions</b>	Thickness and weight	0.6 inches; 3.1 ounces	0.8 inches; 3.7 ounces	0.5 inches; 3.4 ounces
<b>Battery talk time</b>	How long you can talk between charges	4 hours	3.3 hours	3.5 hours
<b>Perfect For</b>		Watching TV while you chat with friends	Style-conscious music lovers	Those who want functionality in a small form factor
<b>Coollest feature</b>		GPS service gives audible, turn-by-turn directions	Streams AT&T TV and radio	Picture caller ID and 1,000 entries in the phonebook
<b>Best Buy price</b> (original; with service plan)		\$349.99; \$89.99	\$349.99; Free	\$199.99; Free
				

	Samsung SCH-u740	<div>SMART PHONE!</div> Samsung BlackJack i607	<div>SMART PHONE!</div> RIM BlackBerry Curve	Sanyo Katana II Midnight Steel	Samsung Upstage M620
	Clamshell	Candy bar; uses Windows Mobile	Candy bar; uses BlackBerry OS	Clamshell, internal antenna	Candy bar
	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	No	No	No	No	No
	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	Verizon	AT&T	AT&T	Sprint PCS	Sprint PCS
	0.58 inches; 3.6 ounces	0.5 inches; 3.5 ounces	0.6 inches; 4.2 ounces	0.6 inches; 3.4 ounces	0.8 inches; 4.2 ounces
	3.5 hours	5.5 hours	4 hours	3.1 hours	3 hours
	Talkers who love to text	Email and productivity addicts	Road warriors who want to have a little fun	Families who want to restrict certain calls for young users	Talkers who also want an integrated MP3 player
	Full QWERTY keyboard for emailing and texting	Small, lightweight Windows smartphone	Integrated media player streams audio and video	Optional Sprint Family Locator uses GPS to locate family	Two-sided design: Phone on one side, MP3 player on the other
	\$299.99; \$79.99	\$499.99; Free	\$429.99; \$169.99	\$199.99; \$29.99	\$349.99; Free
					

# Happy Thanksgiving

Let's face it—Thanksgiving get-togethers take plenty of work and preparation, but with these products from Best Buy ([www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)), you can bring your stress level down a notch. After you've tackled the big feast and piles of dishes, your only concern should be that last slice of pumpkin pie calling your name.





### Oregon Scientific Complete Regional Weather Station with MSN Direct Service

Keep tabs on the conditions for your guests.

\$154.99

### Aero AeroBed Premier Raised Inflatable Mattress (Full)

Inflatable extra room not included.

\$259.99



### iRobot Roomba Bagless Robotic Vacuum Cleaner

If only all the cleaning was this easy.

\$199.99

### LG Kitchen Series 24" Tall Tub Built-In Dishwasher

Thankfully, this helper won't be affected by the tryptophan.

\$1,499.99



### KitchenAid 7-Quart Slow Cooker

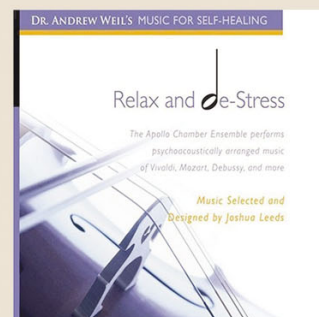
Set it and forget it.

\$129.99

### Relax And De-Stress (CD)

Recommended for use before, during, and after the holiday.

\$14.99



### LG 26.2 Cu. Ft. Side-by-Side Refrigerator with Built-in LCD TV

Roomy on the inside, entertaining on the outside.

\$1,499.99







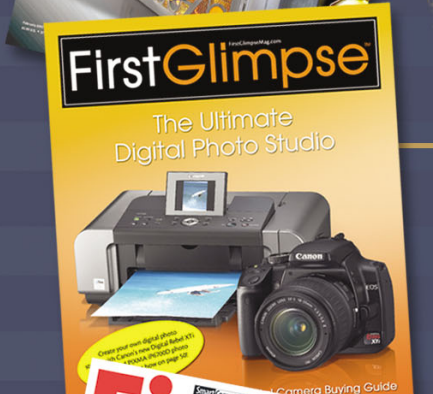
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